NOTABLE NOVELS

# ATTILA

BY

G.P.R. JAMES.

SIXPENCE

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# ATTILA.

## A Romance.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF 'THE GIPSY,' 'MARY OF BURGUNDY,'
'HENRY MASTERTON,' ETC.

'He is their God: he leads them like a thing
Made by some other deity than Nature.'

SHAKESPEARE.

LONDON:
FREDERICK WARNE AND CO.,
BEDFORD STREET, STRAND.

TO

WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR, ESQ.,

This Book,

AS A FEEBLE TESTIMONY OF

STRONG PERSONAL REGARD AND SINCERE ADMIRATION,

Is Dedicated

BY

HIS FRIEND, G. P. R. JAMES.

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# ADVERTISEMENT.

In giving this book to the public, I have but little to explain. The reader who takes it up may expect to find something respecting the Princess Honoria. He will, however, find nothing. All that we know of her history is uninteresting, except to those who love to dwell upon the pruriencies of a degraded state of society; all that we know of her character is disgusting to such as love purity and dignity of mind. It would be tedious to the reader to explain, why the author has thought fit to alter several names of the persons acting prominent parts in the story of Attila. In so doing he has consulted principally his own ear; and in a few other deviations which he has made from the course of that great monarch's history, he has consulted his own convenience. In regard, however, to the change which he has represented as taking place in the demeanour of Attila, his abandonment of the simple habits which at first distinguished him, and his dereliction from the calm equanimity which he displayed in his early intercourse with the Romans, the author believes that he is justified by the records of history, as well as the course of nature. He is inclined to think also, that if, in regard to the facts of Attila's death, we could display the chameleon truth, in the broad light of day, without any of the shades and hues with which time and circumstances have surrounded her, we should find her colour such he has represented it; but this, of course, must ever remain in doubt.

# ATTILA.

## CHAPTER I.

### A LANDSCAPE IN DALMATIA.

MUSIC was in the air, and loveliness was spread out over the earth as a mantle.

There was a voice of many waters—the bland musical tone of mountain streams singing as they wend their way over the smooth round pebbles of their hilly bed towards the sea. And the song of life, too, was heard from every field, and every glade, and every valley; the trilling of innumerable birds, the hum of insect myriads, the lowing of distant cattle, winding down from the uplands to pen or fold, the plaintive subdued bleating of the patient sheep, the merry voice of the light-hearted herd, as he led home his flock from the hills, after a long, warm southern day in the maturity of spring. Manifold sweet sounds—all blended into one happy harmony, softened by distance, rendered more melodious to the heart by associations felt but not defined, and made more touching by the soft evening hour—filled the whole air, and spread a calm, bright, contemplative charm over the listening senses.

The eye, too, could find the same delights as the ear, equal in depth, similar in character; for though sweet April had sunk in the warm arms of May, still, even in that land of the bright south, the reign of summer had not yet begun: not a leaf, not a flower, not a blade of grass, had lost a hue under the beams of the sun, and many a balmy and refreshing shower, during a long and humid spring, had nourished the verdure and enlivened the bloom.

From the high round knoll upon the left, crowned with the five tall cypresses, which, perhaps, flourished as seedlings on that spot in the young and palmy days of Greece, might be seen that unrivalled view which has never yet found eye to gaze on it uncharmed, —that view which, of all prospects in the world, has greatest power, when suddenly beheld, to make the heart beat fast, and the breath come thick with mingled feelings of wonder and delight. On one side, at about a mile's distance, where the ground sloped gently down towards the sea, rose the palace of Diocletian, vast and extensive, massy without being heavy, and equally sublime from its beauty and its dimensions. Clear upon the bright background of the evening sky, cut the graceful lines of the architecture; and, though a sudden break in the outline of the frieze, with the massy form of a fallen capital rolled forward before the steps of the magnificent portico which fronted the sea, told that the busy, unceasing, unsparing hand of man's great enemy had already laid upon that splendid building the crumbling touch of ruin, yet as it then stood, with the setting sun behind it, and the deep blue shadows of the evening involving all the minute parts of the side that met the eye, the effects of decay even added to the beauty of the object, by making the straight lines of the architecture at once contrast and harmonise with the graceful irregularities of nature whereby it was surrounded. Several groups of old and stately trees, too, still more diversified the prospect on that side; and through the pillars of the portico might be caught the distant glistening line of the bright sea where it met and mingled with the sky.

Behind, and to the right hand, stretching far away to the north, rose mountain upon mountain, in all the fanciful forms and positions into which those earth-born giants cast themselves in Greece, and over them all was thrown that lustrous purple which in those lands well deserves the name of the 'magic light of evening.'

Between the knoll of cypresses, however, and those far hills, robed in their golden splendour, lay a wide track of country, gently

sloping upwards in a thousand sweeping lines, with here and there an abrupt rock or insulated mound suddenly towering above the rest, while scattered clumps of tall old trees, rich, rounded masses of forest, villas, farms, vineyards, and olive grounds, filled up the intervening space; and had all been as it seemed—had all those farms been tenanted, had none of those villas been in ruins—would have presented a scene of prosperity such as the world has never known but once.

Still decay had made no very great progress, still the land was richly cultivated, still the population, though not dense, was sufficient; and as the eye ran along the innumerable little promontories and headlands of the bay, might be seen, rising up above some slight irregularities of the ground, a part of the buildings of the small but prosperous town of Salona. Close by the side of that knoll of cypresses, breaking impetuously from a bank above, dashed on the bright and sparkling Hyader; now fretting and foaming with the large rocks amidst which a part of its course was bound; now prattling playfully with the motley pebbles which in other parts strewed its bed; now dashing like a fierce steed all in foam where it leaped over the crag into the sunshine: and then, where its clear blue waters spread out uninterrupted under the cool shadow of a hill, seeming—like time to a young and happy heart—to stand still in calm and peaceful enjoyment, even while it was flowing away as quickly as ever.

The eye that followed the Hyader down its course—and there was an eye that did so—rested on the bright and glowing west, and on the fairest, the most entrancing object of all that magic scene: for there, stretched out beneath the setting sun, lay the gleaming waters of the Adriatic, studded all along its shores with a thousand purple islands, which rose out of that golden sea like gems.

The air was calm and tranquil; the sky, the unrivalled deep blue sky which hangs over that most lovely sea, was without a cloud, varying with one soft and equable declension from the intense purple of the zenith to the warm rosy hues that glowed in the far west. The sea, also, was smooth and peaceful, and would have seemed unbroken by a wave, had not here and there a sudden bending line of light darted over the bosom of the waters, and told that they were moved in the evening light by the breath of the breeze.

Thus appeared the whole scene, when, from the opposite side of the bay, a white sail was seen to glide forward, as if coming from Salona towards the palace of Diocletian, or the little village of Aspalathus. Slowly and peacefully it moved along, giving one more image of calm and tranquil enjoyment; and while it steered upon its way, four sweet voices, sometimes joined in chorus by several deeper tones, broke forth from the mound of cypresses, singing:

## A HYMN TO THE SETTING SUN.

I.

'Slow, slow, mighty wanderer, sink to thy rest,
Thy course of beneficence done;
As glorious go down to thy Thetis' warm breast
As when thy bright race was begun.
For all thou hast done,
Since thy rising, oh, Sun!
May thou and thy Maker be blest!
Thou hast scatter'd the night from thy broad golden way,
Thou hast given us thy light through a long happy day,
Thou hast roused up the birds, thou hast waken'd the flowers,
To chant on thy path, and to perfume the hours—
Then slow, mighty wanderer, sink to thy rest,
And rise again beautiful, blessing, and blest!

II.

'Slow, slow, mighty wanderer, sink to thy rest,
Yet pause but a moment to shed
One warm look of love on the earth's dewy breast,
Ere the starr'd curtain fall round thy bed,
And to promise the time,
When, awaking sublime,
Thou shalt rush all refresh'd from thy rest.
Warm hopes drop like dews from thy life-giving hand,
Teaching hearts closed in darkness like flowers to expand;
Dreams wake into joys when first touch'd by thy light,
As glow the dim waves of the sea at thy sight—
Then slow, mighty wanderer, sink to thy rest,
And rise again beautiful, blessing, and blest!

III.

'Slow, slow, mighty wanderer, sink to thy rest,
Prolonging the sweet evening hour;
Then robe again soon in the morn's golden vest,
To go forth in thy beauty and power.
Yet pause on thy way,
To the full height of day,
For thy rising and setting are blest!
When thou com'st after darkness to gladden our eyes,
Or departest in glory, in glory to rise,
May hope and may prayer still be woke by thy rays,
And thy going be mark'd by thanksgiving and praise!*—
Then slow, mighty wanderer, sink to thy rest,
And rise again beautiful, blessing, and blest!'

* It may not, perhaps, be unnecessary to remind the reader that Christianity, though established in both the Eastern and Western Empires, was still far from universal; and even in the minds of its most enthusiastic votaries was strangely mingled with the picturesque superstitions of a former creed; so that the same man was often a Christian in belief, who was pagan in many of his habits, and almost all his familiar expressions.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE ACTORS IN THE SCENE.

THE voices that sung were sweet, thrillingly sweet, and the music to which the verse was wedded of that dreamy, wandering kind which approaches more nearly to the tones of an Æolian harp than to any regular composition, It was, indeed, full of a wild and delicious melody, which was sometimes solemn and sublime, sometimes low and plaintive, and the same general theme might be heard running through the whole ; but often the air wandered wide, like a bird upon the wing, and caught a note or two of a gladder or more joyous character, which brightened the general solemnity of the strain, like hope breaking in upon a life of grief. Music had not then reached that perfection which it has since attained ; but there was a touching beauty in its fresh simplicity which is now but seldom found. It possessed the free unfettered charms of a graceful nature, cultivated, but not stiffened, by art, and it still went hand in hand with the sister spirit of poetry, in the land where both had birth.

But the hymn which had just floated on the air derived peculiar sweetness from the fine harmony of the voices which sung it. It seemed the varied tones of one family, where each knew every note in the voice of the other, and modulated his own to suit it, with that spirit of love in the breasts of all, whereof the sweetest harmony that art can compose is but the musical image. In the chorus, however, there joined less cultivated singers ; but, nevertheless, the voices were generally fine, and there was an enthusiastic eagerness on the tongues that repeated :

'Then slow, mighty wanderer, sink to thy rest,
And rise again beautiful, blessing, and blest!'

which spoke of that happiness under the bright sun that was then sinking slowly to the breast of ocean, which is the poetry and melody of life.

Under the five tall cypresses, and partly reclining on the bank that sloped to the bright Hyader, sat the group from which those sounds proceeded. It was separated, indeed, into two distinct parts ; for—with a very short space of green turf between them and those they served—lay stretched out in various attitudes, some raising the head upon the hand, some reclining the chest upon the folded arms, some supported on the elbow, eight or nine slaves of both sexes.

There was nothing, however, in the countenances of any there which spoke of the bitterness of slavery. There were no signs in their faces or their demeanour of the iron entering into their soul ; and though, perhaps, no portion of human nature is originally so debased, and no condition of bondage can be rendered so gentle, that the chain will not gall, and the load will not oppress, yet the lot was then common, and the accursed name of slave comprehended nearly, if not fully, one half of the earth's denizens. In the faces of those who lay stretched easily but not intrusively beside those to whom they were bound by that inhuman tie, there might be traced a line of care—perhaps a shade, it might be, of melancholy—gathered by long preserved and fruitless remembrances of scenes, and objects, and persons far away ; and on none, but the countenance of one white-teethed Nubian girl, and a young glad boy, whose life was in the present hour, and to whose mind the past and the future were but a vapoury cloud, was seen the light and laughing merriment of a heart which has known no sorrows in the past. With all the rest, contentment with their lot seemed chastened by griefs experienced and gone by. They could smile, they could sing, when occasion called for mirth. Their minds were not irresponsive to sights or sounds of joy ; but with them it was from the well, not the fountain, that the sweet waters of enjoyment sprung ; they sparkled not up spontaneously, but required to be drawn forth by the hand of another.

Yet if one, remembering their bondage, turned to gaze upon the goup near which they sat, the condition of their feelings was easily understood ; for the forms and faces that were there—not in the outward lineaments alone, but in the beaming forth of the divine spirit, as much expressed in the air and movements of the whole body, as in the heart's interpreter, the face—told that the task-masters were of that kindly nobility of soul, which, in after years, won for a whole class (that did not always merit the distinction) that most expressive name of *gentle*.

Under the cypresses, not exactly where the shade fell—for the sun near the horizon had lost his meridian heat, and the western breeze swept over the cool bright waters of the Adriatic—were seated three women and a boy of some fourteen years of age. They were evidently of the highest race of the land in which they lived ; and had nothing else bespoken their rank, the broad deep border of purple, of triple die, which edged the snowy robe of the eldest of the party, would have distinguished her as a Roman lady of patrician blood. She was scarcely beyond the middle age ; and time had treated her beauty leniently. Somewhat of the elastic grace, and all the slight pliant

outline of early youth, was gone, but in contour and dignity much, too, had been gained; and the eye, more calm and fixed, was as bright and lustrous, the teeth as white and perfect, as ever. The hair, drawn up and knotted on the crown of the head, was still full and luxuriant: but, meandering through its dark and wavy masses, might here and there be seen a line of silver grey; while the cheek, which had once been as warm and glowing as the morning dawn of her own radiant land, sorrows calmly borne, but not the less deeply felt, had rendered as pale as the twilight of the evening just ere night reigns supreme.

Her dress was plain and unadorned, of the finest materials and the purest hues; but the gems and ornaments then so common were altogether absent. The consciousness of beauty, which she might once have felt, was now altogether forgotten; its vanity she had never known. As much grace as health, perfect symmetry of form, and noble education from infancy, could give, she displayed in every movement; but it was the calm and matronly grace, where all is ease, and tranquillity, and self-possession. The same placid charm reigned in the expression of her countenance. She seemed to look with benevolence on all. Nay, more, as if the sorrows which had reached her in her high station had taught her that in every bosom, however well concealed, there is, or will be, some store of grief, some memory, some regret, some disappointment, there mingled with the gentleness of her aspect an expression of pity, or, perhaps, its better name were sympathy, which existed really within, and formed a tie between her heart and that of every other human thing.

She was, indeed, to use the beautiful words of the poet, 'kind as the sun's blessed influence.'* Yet the bright dark eye, the proud arching lip, and the expansive nostrils, seemed to speak of a nature originally less calm, of days when the spirit was less subdued. Time and grief, however, are mighty tamers of the most lion-like heart; and it was with that look of pity, mingling with tender pleasure, that she gazed down upon a beautiful girl, of, perhaps, thirteen years of age, who, leaning fondly on her knees, as the hymn concluded, looked up in her face for sympathetic feelings, while the sweet sounds still trembled on her full rosy lips.

Between the matron and the girl there was little resemblance, except inasmuch as each was beautiful; and though the lineaments perhaps, regarded as mere lines, took, in some degree, the same general form, yet there were too many shades of difference to admit the idea that those two fair beings stood in the dear relationship of mother and child, although the fond, relying, clinging affection displayed in the looks of the younger, and the tender anxiety of the matron's smile, as she gazed down upon her companion's face, argued affections no less strong between them than such a tie might have produced.

Eudochia—for so was the younger called—offered a lovely specimen of that sort of beauty which, however rare in Italy even now, when the native blood of the children of the land has been mingled with that of many of the fair-headed nations of the North, we find from the writings of Petronius to have been not uncommon in his days. Her hair was of a light brown, with a golden gleam upon it, as if, wherever it bent in its rich wavy curls, it caught and shone in the bright rays of the sun. Her eyes were of a soft hazel, though the long sweeping black lashes made them look darker than they were: but her skin was of that brilliant fairness which did indeed exceed the

'Expolitum ebur indicum;'

and the rose glowed through it on the cheeks, as pure and clear as in those lands where the veiled sun shines most soft and tenderly. Her features were, indeed, more Greek than Roman; but her complexion spoke, and not untruly, of a mixture in her veins of what was then called Barbarian blood by the proud children of the empire. Her mother had been the daughter of a German prince in alliance with Rome; but the Romans of that day had learned to envy the noble Paulinus his success with the beautiful child of the wealthy and powerful Barbarian chief. Too short a time, indeed, had their union lasted; for though Eudochia had drawn her first nourishment from her mother's bosom, yet, six months after her birth, the fair wife of Paulinus had left him to mourn her death with two motherless children. He had continued to hold her memory in solitary affection, filling up, as is so common with man, the vacant place left by love in the shrine of his heart with the darker and sterner form of Ambition: and while he led forward his son Theodore in the same path, he left his daughter on the Dalmatian shore, with one whose kindred blood and generous nature insured to the fair girl all a mother's tenderness and a mother's care. For her alone the lips of Eudochia had learned to pronounce those sweetest of words, *my mother*, —for her alone had her heart learned to feel the thrill of filial love.

The affection, however, of the Lady Flavia, for so was called the elder of whom we have spoken, was divided. For the love of man, woman has but one place in her heart, but maternal tenderness has many; and the agony of Niobe was not less for every child that died

* Cowley.

than if she had had but one. Flavia looked upon Eudochia as her child, and loved her as such; but the two others, of whom we have said that group was composed, were in reality her children.

Ammian, the boy, was like his mother in features and complexion, but not in character. More of his dead father's nature had descended to him, more of the wild and daring spirit which, sporting with perils and dangers, contemning pain, and laughing at fear, found food for a bright and eager imagination in scenes and circumstances which, to others, were full of nothing but horror and dismay. His pastime, as a boy, was to climb the mountains, and spring from rock to rock across the yawning chasms; to stand gazing down over the dizzy side of the precipice, and to drink in the sublimity of the scene below; to dash through the wild waves, when the south-west wind rolled them in mountains on the shore, or to mingle with the pagan inhabitants, who still filled many of the villages near, and to watch without taking part in those sacrifices which were prohibited under pain of death by the Christian emperors, but which often took place even in the open face of day. His mother put no check upon his hazardous pleasures, for she was Roman enough to wish that her children might never know the name of fear. But yet her heart sometimes sunk with a chilly dread when she witnessed his wild exploits: for though the qualities which prompted them were those for which she had loved his father, yet she could not forget that the same daring spirit had led that father to death, by barbarian hands, in the wilds of Pannonia.

There was one more in the group under the cypresses, and one that must not be passed over in silence. She, like Eudochia, was reclining by her mother's side; but had the great Florentine sought two lovely models from which to depict night and day, none could have been found equal to these two beautiful girls. Ildica,* however, was fully two years older than Eudochia, and those two years made a great difference. Eudochia was a child; Ildica was no longer so. Eudochia was the violet, but Ildica was the rose. Her form, too, spoke it; youth was in every trace: but there was the rounded contour, the graceful sweeping lines, which tell that nature's brightest effort to produce beauty is full and complete. She was at that age when the causeless blush comes frequent, and the unbidding sigh is first known; when the cheek will sometimes glow as if with shame at the innocent consciousness of loveliness; and her heart tells woman that she was created for others. Through the transparent cheek of the Dalmatian girl the eloquent blood played apparent at every word, and the long lustrous deep black eyes, the very eyelids of which seemed flooded with light, spoke of feelings within that snowy bosom which were yet to acquire intensity and fire. And yet Ildica fancied herself still a child. So gradual, so calm, had as yet been the transition, as their years passed away in that remote spot without any of the cares, the turmoils, the passions, and the follies of courts and of cities breaking the tranquil current of their days, that she hardly knew the two years which had effected so great a change in her being had passed otherwise than in infancy. She had never very eagerly sought the light sports and pastimes of Eudochia, and others of the happy age: she had always shown a disposition to meditation and to feeling. It was not that she wanted cheerfulness; far from it: but it was, that through her very gaiety was seen a train of deeper thought. There was a character of greater intensity in all she did than is usual in early youth. She loved music, she loved poetry, she loved every art; and her mother saw her own mind reflected in that of her daughter, with a shade, perhaps, of more passionate energy derived from the character of her father.

Thus sat they by the bright stream of the Hyader, whose clear water served to mingle with the wine of their light evening meal, enjoying, with sweet tranquillity of heart, the loveliness of a scene which, remembered from his earliest days, had lured Diocletian thither, some century before, from all the charms of power and empire, to spend his latter hours in a remote province and a private station. Simple as that meal was, consisting of nothing but light cakes of a fine flour, with some dried fruits and some early strawberries, it was more delicious to those who ate it, in that fair scene and that happy hour, than all the innumerable dishes of a Roman supper. Still there seemed something wanting; for—as the last stanza of the hymn was sung, and Eudochia lay reclining on the Lady Flavia's lap, and gazing up in her expressive face—the eyes of Ildica had followed the course of the Hyader down towards the sea, and rested with a longing, anxious look upon the boat that, with slow and easy motion, as the light but steady wind impelled it over the waters, steered onward, for some time, towards that part of the bay near which stood the little village of Aspalathus, a sort of appendage to the palace of Diocletian. Ammian, her brother, had remarked it too, and watched it

* The learned reader will perceive, that I have changed the last syllable of this name, for the sake of a more regular feminine termination than the original gives, in sound at least, to an English ear. Let me acknowledge at once, also, that I have followed the same bold plan throughout, changing everything that did not suit my purpose.

also; but in a few minutes its course was changed, and its prow turned towards one of the islands. Ildica said not a word, but she bent down her eyes on the grass, and plucked one of the purple crocuses which checkered the green whereon she sat.

'He will not come to-day,' said her brother, as if quite sure that the same thoughts were in his bosom and his sister's at that moment; 'and, besides, he would not appear in a solitary boat like that. Ten such boats would not have held the gorgeous train which followed him when he came last year to take Theodore away.'

'But remember, Ammian, my son,' said Flavia, smiling at the eager looks of her two children, 'remember, when last he came, our cousin Paulinus was sent to Dalmatia on the Emperor's service, as Count of the Offices, and now he comes but as a private man to see his daughter. He is not one of those degraded Romans who in the present day never travel without an army of domestics. See, the boat has changed its course again. It did but bear up against the current of wind between the islands. Eudochia, my sweet child, it is perhaps your father after all.'

As she spoke, the boat, catching the favourable breeze, came more rapidly towards the land, and in a moment after was hidden from their eyes by the wavy ground which lay between them and the Adriatic. 'Run, Aspar, run,' cried Flavia to one of the slaves; 'run and see where the boat lands. Shall we return homeward, Eudochia? we may meet him sooner.'

Ildica exclaimed, 'Oh yes!' but Eudochia and Ammian reminded their mother that they had promised to meet Paulinus on the spot where they had parted from him, even where they then sat; and, while they waited in the heart-beating moments of expectation, the light-footed slave again appeared upon the upland, which he had cleared like a hunted deer, and stood waving his hand, as if to tell that their hopes were verified.

For a moment or two he paused, looking back towards the sea, and then, running forward to the cypresses, he said, 'Yes, lady, yes! they have reached the shore and are coming hither. I saw them spring from the boat to the landing-place of the palace; and while several ran up towards the portico bearing baggage, four took the path between the rocks which leads up hither by the field of Eusebius the gardener.'

'Was my brother there, good Aspar?' cried Eudochia, eagerly; 'was my brother there, too?'

'I could not distinguish, sweet one,' replied the slave; 'the distance was too long for my sight, and the sun was directly in my eyes; but the one that came first was slight in form, and seemed more like your brother than the Count Paulinus himself. There was the lightness of youth, too, in his step, as he bounded up over the rocks like a fawn towards its doe!'

Flavia smiled, and Ildica smiled too; but as she did so there was a slight, a very slight, change of colour in her cheek. It grew paler; but it was not the paleness of either apprehension or disappointment; it only spoke of some intense feelings busy at her heart, though what they were, she herself knew not. At that moment the slave exclaimed, 'Lo, lo! he comes!' and all eyes were turned towards the upland.

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## CHAPTER III.

### THE MEETING.

THE lower edge of the sun's broad golden disc touched, or seemed to touch, the rippling waters of the Adriatic, and sea and sky were all in one general glow, when the form of the expected guest rose over the slope, and, with joyful arms outstretched towards the group under the cypresses, he appeared clear and defined upon the bright expanse behind him. The figure was that of a youth of eighteen or nineteen years of age, tall for his time of life, and of that form which promises great after strength. As he stood there, indeed, with his figure partly concealed by the mantle which fell from his shoulders, and with the smooth features, the unfurrowed brow, and beardless chin of youth, turned from the searching rays of the sun, one might have attributed to him many more years than he had in reality numbered; but there was the bounding joy of boyhood still in his steps as, followed by three persons, amongst whom the eye of Flavia sought in vain for Paulinus, he sprang across the sloping ground to meet so many that he loved. To Flavia his first salute was given in the warm, the touching, the affectionate kiss of filial love; calling her, as he did so, by the tender name which his heart always willingly granted to her who had watched his infancy and formed his boyhood, 'My mother!' His next glance was, certainly, to Ildica, but his words and his embrace were given, first, to his sister Eudochia, and then even to Ammian, whom he also called 'his brother.'

The words, however, were few, and the embrace short, ere he turned to Ildica, and took her hand. But his aspect was for a moment timid and uncertain, as if he knew not well in what words and what manner he was to greet her. Her eye, however, was full of light; her

lip smiled with the irrepressible spirit of joy; her breath seemed to come short with some thrilling emotion in her bosom; and Theodore, growing bolder as her hand touched his, drew her, too, to his arms, and pressed a warmer kiss upon her lips. To her he would not say, 'My *sister!*' though he began those words which he had so often used towards her; but he stopped short, and his lips murmured, 'My—my Ildica!'

If any one marked the agitation of either of those two young and happy beings, it was amongst the slaves; for Eudochia and Ammian had no eyes as yet for the slighter indications of the heart's inmost feelings; and Flavia, without any other observation, asked eagerly, 'But where is Paulinus? Where is your father, Theodore?'

'Alas, my mother!' replied the youth; 'he has been disappointed, and would not make me a sharer therein. Obliged to go into Cappadocia by the emperor's commands, he proceeds from Cæsarea to escort the Empress Eudoxia to Jerusalem. But he has promised, if fate be propitious, to join us all here on his return. He would not let me bear him company; but having given me the charge of some slight business at Salona, left me to hasten hither, and wait his coming.'

'Let us return homeward, then, Theodore,' said the matron, 'and you shall tell us all the news wherewith your young and ever active mind is loaded. I am sure you have not yet learned, my son, to value all the things of the world according to their real lightness, and to suffer what the idle multitude call great events to pass you by as matters which have been acted over and over again a thousand times already, and to be enacted still a million times more in the ages yet to come. Heaven forbid that you should have acquired, since you left us, such sorrowful wisdom! though your father writes to me that you have become a man, whereas you left us a boy. But you linger as if you would fain stay here.'

'I ordered the boat to come round hither,' replied the youth, 'when I found you were all here; and I would willingly gaze again upon all these lovely things. I have beheld many lands, dear Ildica,' he added, turning naturally towards her with whom his heart held the nearest communion—'I have beheld many lands since I left you all on this very spot: Athens, the city of Constantine, Ida, and Olympus. My feet have even trodden Tempe; and yet there is no scene so beautiful to my eyes as that lovely sea, with Bratia, and Bubua, and Olyntha, rising like living sapphires from its golden bosom, and those grand Autariatian hills, leading up the soul's flight to heaven.'

Without further question, they all once more laid themselves down upon the turf, feeling that Theodore would gladly see the sun set in that spot with which so many memories of early happiness were associated; and for a few minutes they left him in silence to enjoy the delight of his return. He gazed round the prospect; and it was easy to see that it was not alone the loveliness that his eye rested on which busied his thoughts; but that remembrance was eagerly unclasping with her fairy touch the golden casket of the past, and displaying, one by one, the treasured and gemlike memories of many joyful hours. As he gazed, the last effulgent spot of the sun's orb sunk below the sea; and he turned his look upon Ildica, on whose hand his own had accidentally fallen. Her eyes were full of liquid light; and her cheek was glowing as warmly as that sky from which the sun had just departed.

'And now, Theodore,' said Flavia, with a smile, 'tell us what tidings you bring; and first, before one word of the wide public news, say, what of your father? How is he in health? How fares he at the court? Is he as much loved as ever?'

'I had forgotten,' replied Theodore, 'in the joy of coming back—in the dreamlike and scarcely certain feeling of being here once more amongst you all—I had forgotten everything else. Paulinus is well, my mother; and his favour with the emperor and empress higher than ever, though he is not loved by Chrysapheus; but he fears him not. Here, Zeno!' he continued, addressing one of the servants who had followed him, and who had now mingled with the slaves of Flavia, 'give me the case which I bade you bring;' and from a richly-chased silver casket, which the slave laid beside him, he drew forth a string of large and perfect pearls. 'These, Eudochia,' he said, throwing them over his sister's neck, 'these from the empress, for her goddaughter; and this,' he added, taking the rich collar of emeralds which lay below,—'and this from my father, Paulinus, for his dear Ildica. Many were the messages of love,' he continued, as he placed the splendid present sent by his father in the hand of the beautiful girl whom it was to adorn; and, with the playfulness of boyhood not yet passed away, twined, smiling, the links of emeralds round her arm—'many were the messages of love my father bade me give to all; and to you, my mother, I bear this letter: but let me be the first to tell you that your possession of the palace is confirmed by the emperor, and that the estates withheld from you by an unjust judge are restored.'

'Thank you, my son, thank you,' replied Flavia, opening the thread with which the letter was bound round; 'but this light is too faint to enable me to decipher your father's epistle. Let us to the boat, my Theodore, and so homeward; for I long to learn of what

has passed at Byzantium, and the twilight is every moment getting a greyer hue.'

The youth lingered no longer, but rose with all the rest; and while Flavia, talking to Ammian, who often looked behind, led the way over the upland and down the path towards the sea, Theodore followed, at some little distance, with Eudochia cling to his left arm, and with his right hand clasping that of Ildica. As they went wandering onward through the sweet smelling copses of myrtle, which sheltered the grounds of a neighbouring garden from the east wind, Eudochia asked a thousand questions of her brother, and marvelled much that he had grown so tall and strong in the short absence of nine months. Ildica said not a word; but she listened to the tones of his voice as he replied to his sister; she felt the touch of his hand as it held hers; she saw the brother of her love—the more than brother—returned from a far distance and a long absence; and a new happiness, that she had never known before, filled her heart with emotions too intense for speech. Did she know what she felt? Did she investigate the nature of the busy tumultuous sensations that then possessed her bosom? Neither! the absence of one with whom she had dwelt in affection from her infancy, had indeed taught her that there were strange feelings in her heart, different from any that she had ever experienced before; but, oh! sweet and happy skill of woman, she had closed her eyes against all investigation of what those feelings were, lest she should find anything mingling with them which might render them less blessed. It was not for her to discover for herself that which was reserved for another to explain.

The considerate slaves lingered somewhat farther still behind, caring for the cups and vessels which had served the evening meal, and listening with the wondering ears of hermits to the news brought by their fellows from the capital of the Eastern world. Much, too, had those slaves to tell of all the splendid scenes which were hourly taking place in Constantinople, and the high favour and honour of their master, Paulinus, at the imperial court. Each feeling his importance increased by the honours and virtues of his lord, exalted in no measured terms the power and dignity of Paulinus; and to have heard the praises of his menials, one might have believed that he excelled in learning and in talents the greatest men of literature's most golden days, and rivalled in the field the most renowned warriors of either Greece or Rome. One thing, at all events, was to be gathered from their discourse, and to be received without abatement; which was, that he possessed the great and happy talent of making himself loved by those who served him. Such, indeed, was his character: dignified, but not haughty, to his equals; respectful, but not slavish, to his superiors; he had always a kindly word or a warm smile to give to those whom fortune had placed beneath him. He did not court popularity, and the vulgar gratulations of the circus would have been offensive to his ear: but to a menial or to a woman he at once unbent the calm and philosophic reserve of his demeanour for the time of their temporary communication; and, with a gleam of kindly warmth, he cheered all those who approached him, as weaker or less fortunate than himself. Such a tribute is due to a man whose innocence even was not his friend, and who awakened jealousies even while he strove to disarm them.

Speaking thus of their well-loved lord, the slaves followed slowly till they approached the shore; and, then, running forward to make up for their tardiness by momentary alacrity, they officiously aided the boatmen to push the boat close up to some grey rocks, which, shining through the clear blue water for many a foot below the ripple that checkered the surface, afforded a sort of natural pier for the party to embark. Flavia and her companions took their seats in the stern, and six or seven of the slaves placed themselves in the bow, the rest proceeding along the shore towards the palace. Ammian, leaning over the side in his fanciful mood, gazed down upon the small waves as they were dashed from the path of the boat; and then, catching a rippling gleam of yellow light tinging the crest of one of those tiny billows, he looked up to the heavens, where, just in that spot of deep sky, towards which the streamer of the aplustrum turned, calm, and large, and bright, rose Hesperus above the world. He gazed upon it for several minutes with a look of rapt enjoyment, as if for the time he had forgotten everything in the universe but that one bright solitary star. Ildica had hitherto sat between her mother and Theodore, listening in silence to the brief and broken tales of his late travels which he was telling; but as a pause ensued, she fixed her eyes upon Ammian, and watched him with a soft smile, as if she knew what was passing in his thoughts, and waited to see what turn the fancy would take. From time to time her eyes appealed to Theodore, and then turned again to her brother, till at length her sweet musical voice, speaking her pure native tongue, but slightly touched and softened by the Greek accent, was heard breaking the momentary silence which had fallen upon them all.

'Sing it, Ammian,' she said, speaking to his unuttered thoughts, 'sing it! Theodore will hear it well pleased. It is my mother's poetry, written since you left us, Theodore; sing it, Ammian!'

The boy looked up into his sister's eyes with a gay smile, and then poured suddenly forth in song a voice clear and melodious as her own. The first two stanzas he sung alone; but at the end of the second, and of each that succeeded, all those who knew the music took up the first as a chorus, sending sweet harmony over the twilight waters, while the rowers with their oars kept time to his—

### SONG TO THE EVENING STAR.

I.

Herperus! Hesperus! in thy bright hand
Bearing thy torch, lit at day's parting beams,
Shed thy sweet influence o'er our dear land,
Soothe thou our slumbers, and brighten our dreams.

II.

Hesperus! Hesperus! each closing flower
Yields thee the sigh of her odorous breath,
Thine, too, the nightingale's musical hour,
Thine be the offering of song and of wreath.
Hesperus! Hesperus! etc.

III.

Hesperus! Hesperus! holding thy way
Lone, but serene, 'twixt the day and the night,
Guide all our hearts with the same even sway,
Soften each sorrow and calm each delight.
Hesperus! Hesperus! etc.

IV.

Hesperus! Hesperus! star of repose!
Herald of rest to the labours of day!
Through worlds and through ages, where'er thy light glows,
Honour and thanks shall attend on thy ray.
Hesperus! Hesperus! etc.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### THE YOUNG LOVERS.

It was more than an hour after the boat had reached the landing place, and, fatigued with a long, bright, happy day, Ammian and Eudochia had sought the repose of hearts at ease; while Flavia, sitting with her daughter and Theodore in the small chamber near the great Corinthian hall in the palace of Diocletian, busied herself with manifold questions in regard to those friends of other years, in Constantinople and in Rome, from whom she had voluntarily separated herself, in order to lead her children up to years of free agency, at a distance from the luxury and corruption of either great metropolis. The anecdotes which he had to relate, the little traits and rumours which he had collected, concerning those whom she had once loved dearly, seemed of greater interest to the Lady Flavia than even the news of more personal importance which he told her. Yet that news imported that the cession of a portion of Illyria by Valentinian to Theodosius was completely defined—that the dwelling in which she had found a home, by the interest of Paulinus, was now fully transferred from the monarch of the West, who had shown a strong disposition to despoil her of her lands in distant provinces, to the chief of the Eastern empire, who, on the contrary, had hitherto given her kindly aid and protection; and that her possession of that sweet spot, near which many of the estates of her dead husband lay, was confirmed to her by the hand of Theodocius himself.

The lamp had been placed at her right hand, in order that she might peruse the letter of Paulinus; but still she had not proceeded to that task. What were the feelings which stayed her, it were difficult to say; but the open pages lay unread by her side; and though she more than once took them up, as if to begin, she laid them down again as often, and asked some new question. At length, as the moonlight found its way through the half-curtains of the door, she once more raised the letter, saying, 'Well, I will read it now,' and her eye again fixed upon the first few words.

'Notwithstanding, gentle Flavia,' so the epistle ran, 'the desire I had expressed to keep hidden from my son, and our sweet Ildica, our hopes and purposes, yet feelings that I cannot well explain, but which I will now attempt to depict, have induced me, sure of your consent and approbation, to tell him, ere he left me—perhaps for the last time—that it was my wish and hope, if his own heart seconded my desire, that he should, in his twentietn year, choose the one we both so dearly love for his bride.'

Flavia raised her eyes to her daughter and the son of Paulinus, who had, in the occupation which had just employed her, a fair excuse for speaking in low and gentle murmurs. They had farther drawn back the curtains, and were gazing from the door upon the moonbeams which lighted up the great hall; and a bright warm smile upon the mother's face told that her own heart took kindly part in the fond feelings which were so busy in theirs. She turned to the letter again, however, without comment, and read on. 'I am about,' continued Paulinus, 'to travel through the provinces, and the will of God may require that I shall never return. I know not why, but I have a sadness upon me. As the sun goes down, small objects cast long shadows;

and I have fancied, that I once, and only once, beheld a cold look in the eye of the Emperor towards me, a triumphant smile on the countenance of Chrysapheus; yet, if ever omens were infallible, they would be the smiles of our enemies and the coldness of our friends. Nevertheless, let me acknowledge all my weakness—weakness which philosophy cannot conquer, and which it were wisdom to conceal from any other eye than thine, oh, thou that hast been as a sister to my widowed heart, as a mother to my orphan children. Before any evil augury could be drawn from the looks of others, my own heart seemed to feel the coming on of fate. There has been a shadow on my spirit, an apprehension of coming evil, a sensation of neighbouring danger, such as domestic animals feel when near a lion, even without seeing it.'

Flavia laid down the page, murmuring, 'And is it so, Paulinus? alas, and is it so?—Go forth, my children,' she added, abruptly, seeing them still standing in the doorway; 'you seemed as if you longed to taste the moonlight air. Go forth! It is a grand sight to gaze upon the waters of the Adriatic from that noble portico. It expands the heart, it elevates the mind, it raises the soul to the God who made all things. Go forth, then, my children! I would willingly be alone.'

They needed no second bidding; for she told them to do that which had lain as a longing at their hearts ever since she had begun to read. Not a year before, when they had last parted, they would have waited no command—nay, no permission; but would at once, in the unconscious liberty of the young heart, have bounded forth to enjoy the scenes they loved, in the society that they loved not less—that of each other. But a change had come over their feelings since then, rendering all their intercourse more sweet, a thousand times more sweet, but more timid also. Theodore, indeed, knew why; for his father's parting words—the solemn sanction which Paulinus had given to his future union with Ildica, in case death should prevent a father's lips from pronouncing the blessing at their marriage feast—had opened his eyes to the nature of his own sensations. No sooner had the few first words been uttered by Paulinus than he had felt at once that his love for Ildica was more than fraternal affection; that it was different—how different!—from that which he experienced towards Eudochia; how different from that which he entertained towards any other human being! With Ildica, the knowledge was more vague: it was more a sensation than a certainty. So long as Theodore had been with her she had gone on treating him as a brother; but with the feelings of her heart changing towards him still, as imperceptibly, but still as completely, as the green small berry changes to the purple grape, the verdant bud, to the expanded and to the yellow leaf. So long as he had been with her she had felt no alteration, though it took place; but during his absence she meditated on those things long and deeply; and on his return she met him with not less affection, but with deep and timid emotions, mingling a consciousness with her every look, which was sweet to the eye that saw it, and that wished it to be so.

Theodore raised the curtain, and Ildica passed out; but ere she had taken two steps in that grand moonlight hall, Theodore's hand clasped hers, and he led her on through all those splendid apartments—which have been, even in ruins, the wonder and the admiration of all after days—to the vast colonnade, six hundred feet in length, which fronted and overlooked the beautiful Adriatic. As they passed, in the various apartments of the slaves and domestics were to be seen lights, and to be heard many a gay voice laughing; and at the end of the principal street of the palace, for it had its streets as well as corridors, two or three groups were seen playing in the moonlight with polished pieces of bone, or with loud and vehement gesticulations disputing about their game. Theodore almost feared that the portico itself might be tenanted by some such party; and his heart had anticipated an hour of lonely wandering with her he loved so eagerly, that he might not have brooked disappointment with old and stoical patience. That portico, however, was considered by the general inhabitants of the palace, and those also of the neighbouring village, as in some degree sacred ground. It was there that the great Emperor, after having conquered and reigned in glory through the prime of life, after having satisfied the vengeful zeal of his counsellors against the Christian sects, which now, in spite of all his persecutions, peopled the whole land, after having made his name awful by deeds of blood, not less than by deeds of magnificence, had been accustomed to sit self-stripped of his power, and to gaze out, *after having been an emperor*, upon nearly the same scene which his eyes beheld, *before he was anything but a slave*. Although little more than a century had elapsed since the death of Diocletian, his fate and history, his acts and his character, had been strangely distorted by tradition; and though the peasantry had not learned to look upon him as a bad man, or to execrate him as a tyrant, yet the extraordinary vicissitudes which he had hewn out for himself, the vague legends of his acts during life, and the mystery attaching to his death, surrounded his memory with a fearful awe, which held the people of the neighbourhood aloof from the spot for which he had shown such peculiar fondness, when

night covered the world with her dim and fanciful shades.

The portico was vacant; happy sounds rose up from the shore, where the fishermen were lingering beside their boats; and a merry laugh, or snatches of some light song, were heard from the neighbouring village, sinking into the hearts of Ildica and Theodore with the power of a charm, waking associations of sweet domestic joy, dim and undefined, but thrilling, potent, overpowering. Oh! who can tell the many magic avenues through which all the external things of the wide universe find, at some time or other, means of communicating with the inmost heart—avenues, the gates of which are shut till, at some cabalistic word of grief or joy, or hope or fear, they suddenly fly open; and we find in our bosom a thousand sweet and kindred fellowships, with things which had never learned to touch or agitate us before.

Glad and cheerful, yet calm, were the sounds that broke occasionally upon the listening ear of night; and grand and solemn, but still gentle, was the scene which lay stretched beneath the risen moon; but the sensations which were in the breasts of the two, rendered those sounds and sights a thousand fold sweeter, a thousand fold more dear; and in return, the gay distant voices, and the calm wide moonlight sea, seemed to draw forth and render intense, even to overwhelming, in the souls of Theodore and Ildica,

'Into the mighty vision passing,'

the inborn joy of all the new emotions to which that day had given life within their hearts. They paused and listened to the melody of innocent mirth, and paused and gazed upon the bright world before them. Ildica's hand trembled in that of Theodore, and her heart beat quick; but he felt that she was his, and that she was agitated; and with the gentleness of true affection, though without any definite plan for sparing her, he took the very means of telling his first tale of love, so as to agitate as little as possible the young and tender being, all whose deepest feelings were given to him alone.

'Hark!' he said, 'hark, dear Ildica! how gay and sweet those merry voices sound! Some lover come back from wandering like me, tells the glad story of his journey done to the ear of her who has watched for him in absence.'

Ildica grew more calm, and raised her eyes, too, to Theodore, not without some feeling of surprise, so different was his tone, so much more manly were his words, than when they had parted. There had been, up to that moment, one thing, perhaps, wanting in her love towards him—the conscious feeling of man's ascendancy: she had loved with passion deep, sincere, and ardent; but she had loved as a girl, and looked upon him still as the companion of her early sports. His words and tone—the words and tone of one who had mingled with, and taken his place amongst, men—put the last rose to the wreath. She felt that thenceforth to him she could cling for protection—to him she could turn for guidance and direction.

But Theodore went on. 'Some lover,' he said, 'or perhaps some husband, Ildica, returned from the labours of the day to home and happiness, and sweet domestic love! Oh! dear Ildica, since I have been away, often have I, in wandering through different provinces, lodged in the dwellings of traders in the towns, or in the cottages of shepherds and labourers in the mountains and the plains; and the most beautiful, the most blessed thing that I have ever seen has been found as often, if not oftener, in the hut of the herd or the house of the common merchant, as in the marble palaces of the Cæsars, and within the walls of imperial cities. Oh, that sweet domestic love! that blessing—that bright blessing! which, like the glorious light of the sun, shines alike on every condition, and on every state, cheering, enlivening, enlightening all who shut it not out from their own dark hearts by vices and by crimes. Hark, hark! dear Ildica, how those gay voices seem to chime to my words, speaking of love, and joy, and hope! Oh, Ildica, dear Ildica! may not such things be also for you and me?'

Ildica sunk down on the stone seat by which they had been standing, but she left her hand still in his, and he felt it tremble. Nor did he himself speak unmoved; for his ardent nature, and the first breaking forth of those dear and treasured thoughts, shook his whole frame, and scarcely daring to trust his lips with further words, he placed himself by her side, murmuring only, 'Dearest Ildica!' She answered only with a long-drawn, agitated sigh, and gliding his arm round her soft waist, he drew her gently to his bosom.

'Oh, Theodore, is not this wrong?' she asked, but without attempting to free herself from his embrace.

'Wrong, my Ildica? wrong, my beloved?' he exclaimed; 'oh, no! God forbid that I should ever seek to make you do or feel aught that is evil! No, no, dearest, my father's blessing will attend our union; he has promised, he has given it: our dear mother's consent was spoken to him long ago!'

'Indeed!' cried Ildica.

'Yes, indeed,' he said, pressing her again closer to his bosom, from which she had partly raised herself as she spoke. 'Yes, indeed, Ildica! Joyful did my father's words sound in my ear, as he told me that if I could win

your love, I might hope for your hand. Nothing now is wanting to my happiness but one dear word from my Ildica's sweet lips. Oh, speak it, beloved! Speak it; and say you will be mine.' She could not find voice to utter the deep feelings of her heart; but her cheek sunk glowing upon his shoulder, and their lips met in the first dear long thrilling kiss of happy and acknowledged love.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE DISASTER.

FROM a dream of happiness such as mortal beings know but once on this side of the grave—a dream of happiness in which all the brightest, noblest, most joyful feelings of the fresh, unsullied, unexhausted heart of youth burst forth, like the streams of the Nile from a thousand beautiful sources, Ildica and Theodore woke at length, and prepared to return to the side of her mother, to make her a sharer in their joy, and tell her how blest, how supremely blest they felt. Clinging close together in attitudes of tenderness, from which Attic sculptors might have learned yet another grace, they rose and moved along the portico. They moved, however, but slowly, lingering still for some fond word, some affectionate caress, or pausing in the scene, hallowed for ever in their eyes by the first spoken words of love, to gaze over it again and again between the colossal pillars of the portico. Over that scene, however, had by this time come a change, one of those sudden, inexplicable alterations not uncommon in southern climates. The moon, which by this time had wandered on far enough to warn them that the crowded moments had flown quickly away, was still hanging over the Adriatic, and pouring forth that glorious flood of light which makes the stars all 'veil their ineffectual fires;' but the sky was no longer without clouds, and catching the light upon their rounded but not fleecy edges, the large heavy masses of electric vapour swept slow over the lower part of the sky, between the bright orb and the islands that slept beneath her beams. Theodore and Ildica paused to mark them, as slowly contorting itself into hard and struggling forms, one particular mass lay writhing upon the horizon, like some giant Titan wrestling with agony on his bed of torture. At the same time, the breeze which was balmy, though calm, during the evening, became oppressively hot, with a faint phosphoric smell in the air, and a deep silence seemed to spread over the whole world. The cigala was still, the voices on the shore had ceased, the merry laugh no longer resounded from the open cottage door, and the nightingale, which had prolonged her song after all the rest was silent, ceased also, and left a solemn hush over the whole universe.

'What strange forms that cloud is taking,' said Theodore, called even from the thoughts of his own happiness by the sudden alteration of the scene; 'and how quiet everything is. Doubtless, there will be a storm to-night. Alas! for those who are upon the treacherous sea.'

'But your father,' said Ildica; 'he goes by land, Theodore. Is it not so?'

'Not so, dearest,' replied Theodore; 'he visits first Antioch, and then proceeds by land; but it is not for him I fear, as I heard of his landing while I was on the journey hither; but those strange clouds and the heat of the air, must surely augur thunder to-night; and I saw a whole fleet of boats this morning at Tragurium, ready to put to sea.'

'It is indeed warm,' said Ildica; 'I feel almost faint with the heat. Had we lived a few centuries ago, Theodore, we might have drawn evil auguries for ourselves and for the fate of our affection from those hard clouds, the dull and almost mournful silence which has fallen over the world.'

'Out upon auguries, my beloved,' he replied, 'we hold a better faith, and place our trust in God, who made our hearts and formed us for each other. We will confide in him, my Ildica; and for those who do so, signs and portents are put proofs of his power, which should strengthen, not shake our faith.

As he spoke he turned to lead her into the palace; but at that moment the low, sad howling of a dog broke the stillness of the night; and a figure, the face of which was turned from the moonlight, but which Ildica at once recognized as her mother, appeared at the end of the colonnade, and advanced towards them. Ildica and Theodore hastened to meet her, and each took and kissed one of her fair hands. 'Give us your blessing, O my mother!' said the youth; 'we have been very happy. I have told Ildica how I love her. I have told her what hopes my father has given me; and she has promised to share my lot and make my home joyful.'

'Bless you, my children, bless you!' replied Flavia, while Ildica hid her face on her mother's bosom, and Theodore again pressed his lips upon her hand. 'Ye are young lovers, indeed; but still my blessing be upon you; and oh! may God grant that in the course of that love which is made to render us happy, you may be more fortunate than the parents of either! Your father, Theo-

dore, and I have both lost those we loved as fondly as you love one another; but may better fate be yours, my children! may you never lose each other; but go on in the same warm affections through a long life, and death scarcely separate you, till we all meet again in heaven.'

Flavia raised her eyes towards the sky, and for a moment remained in silence, though her lips still moved. The next instant, however, she added, 'I came out to seek you, not because I thought you long absent, nor because I had any cause of fear; but I know not how or why it is, a painful, apprehensive anxiety hangs upon me to-night which will not let me rest. Perhaps it is the sultry heat of the atmosphere; the air has grown very oppressive; even the animals seem to feel it. Your sister's dog, Theodore, would not rest in her usual place by my feet, but ran out through the curtains; and Aspar told me as I passed that it had fled to the garden. How the cattle, too, are lowing in the village stalls! Do you not hear them? Does the wind come from Bratia?'

'Nearly,' replied Theodore; 'but cast away melancholy, my dear mother. Oh! that Ildica and I could give you a share of our happiness!'

'You do! you do, dear youth,' replied Flavia; 'I do share in your happiness; and this melancholy will pass away again. Those who have known much grief are subject to such thick coming fancies; and the first touch of deep sorrow brushes off the bloom of hope, crushes the firm confidence of the heart, and leaves shrinking apprehension to tremble at every breath; but let us in; there is a storm coming on.'

As she spoke there was a low melancholy sound came rushing over the waters of the Adriatic; the clouds, which had before passed so slow and silently along, seemed now agitated by some unknown cause, and rushed in dark black volumes over the moon; while here and there, amidst the clefts and rents of their dark canopy, looked out a calm bright star. But still the mourning sound increased; and the bending branches of the olives down below told that the breath of the tempest was already felt. The next instant, ere the lovers and Flavia could escape from the colonnade, the blast of the hurricane struck the building and shook the massy structure to its foundations. Behind the shelter of a pillar the two women escaped; but Theodore, strong and active as he was, found himself dashed forward against the wall of the palace; while leaves, and flowers, and broken boughs of trees were whirled about in the air, and strewed the marble pavement of the portico. It lasted but for a moment, however, dying away as it came, with a low moan; while a few large drops of rain followed, as if the punished demon of the storm fulfilled his allotted task of destruction with tears and with regret.

'Flavia! Ildica! you are not hurt!' cried Theodore, springing towards them.

'No! no!' replied Flavia, 'we are safe; though it was a fearful gale. But let us in, Theodore; it may return. Hark!—Good God! what is this?'

Well might she so exclaim. The wind had gone by; even its murmur had ceased; when suddenly there rose a roar from the earth as if ten thousand war chariots had met in the shock of battle. The lightning burst forth from the clouds, and flashed along amidst the innumerable dark gigantic pillars of the colonnade, lighting the whole of its vast extent with the blue and ghastly glare; the thunder rolled from the zenith of the horizon with a peal which would have deafened the ear to the loudest voice. But the lightning flashed and the thunder roared, scarcely seen or heard; for below, around, was a more dreadful visitation still. The earth shook beneath their feet; the pavement rose and fell like the waves of the sea; the enormous columns tottered and reeled; the walls of massive stone bent to and fro; while the roar of the earthquake and the echoing of the thunder were rendered more terrific by the crash of falling building, and the shrieks both from the interior of the palace and the more distant village. Theodore cast his arms round Ildica and her mother; and, staggering along, hurried them down the steps across the level in front of the palace, and out of danger of its shaken walls. It was the impulse of the moment which made him act and Flavia yield; but she paused ere they were many steps from the building, exclaiming, 'My children! Theodore, my children!—Your sister and Ammian!—I must go back.'

'And I will go too!' said Ildica, in a voice so calm that it made her lover turn suddenly to gaze upon her who seemed to have lost the timid girl in the first moment of danger and horror.

'No! no!' he exclaimed. 'Dear mother, hear me! There will be a second shock doubtless, but it will be some minutes ere it comes. Hasten with Ildica beyond the golden gate and up the side of the hill out of reach of all buildings. I will seek Ammian and Eudochia, and join you in a moment. Fly, fly, dear mother! I leave in your charge what I value more than life. Save her!'

Flavia hesitated; but that moment a slave with a torch rushed out into the portico seeking them, while the motion of the ground subsided and all became still. It was the swift runner, Aspar, who came up, crying, 'Fly,

lady! Fly, dear mistress! the worst shock is never first; fly to the hills, fly.'

'Away with them, Aspar, beyond the golden gate,' cried Theodore, breaking from them; 'I will join you instantly. Away, away!'

Thus saying, he darted from them, rushed through the portico, and crossed the side avenue, while the wild clamour from the principal street of the palace echoed through the long halls and galleries; and the deep darkness in which that part of the building was plunged, rendered the distant sound of wailing and of terror more frightful. On, on he went, though fragments of stone and cement obstructed his way, and crumbled under his feet, showing that even the first shock had been severe enough to shake that strong and massive fabric through every part. But Theodore still hurried forward, till at length, in his haste, as he passed the spot where he and Ildica had seen the slaves playing on the pavement, he stumbled over a large soft body, and stooping down, he felt with horror, beneath his touch, the yet warm form of a man, with the newly-fallen capital of a neighbouring column lying with crushing weight upon his loins. The long hair floating on his shoulders showed Theodore that the unhappy being had been a slave; but still the instinctive benevolence of the youthful heart made him pause a moment to ascertain if life were extinct. He spoke, but not a tone answered; he lifted the hand, in which life's soft warmth yet lingered; but not even a convulsive movement of the fingers told that one spark of the immortal fire still glowed in the mortal body. All was motionless, insensible, lifeless; and Theodore hurried on.

The gates of the Cyzicene hall were open; the glare of lights and the sound of voices came from within; and Theodore instantly entered, as the shortest way to the apartments occupied by Flavia and her household. Never, perhaps, did terror in all its forms present itself more awfully than in that grand and splendid chamber. There, as a general point of meeting, had collected eighty or ninety of the slaves and domestics of both sexes. Fear had not yet had time to subside; and with pale and haggard faces, livid lips, and wide anxious eyes they remained, some clinging to the columns which had so lately been shaken like reeds; some kneeling in the midst, and uttering the confused and terrified prayer; some cast down upon the pavement in utter self-abandonment; some hiding their eyes in their garments, as if they could shut out the approaching horrors that they feared to witness; some gazing wildly up to the roof, which they expected momently to fall upon them. Large fragments of the beautiful paintings which had covered the walls, were now seen dashed about upon the floor; and a wide rent in the solid masonry over the door showed how insecure was the shelter which those terrified beings had sought from the night of the earthquake.

In the midst stood, gathered together in the hour of danger, three dusky Numidians, with a servant from the neighbouring Pentapolis, who, in happier times, had been too near akin to the dark Africans to live with them in amity, but who now clung to them for support; while a gigantic slave, from the Porphyry mountains, one of the few who looked the unusual dangers of the night in the face with calm determination, was seen in the front, crushing out under his large foot a torch which one of his more terrified companions had let fall. There were two or others who stood near, and with arms folded on their chests, and dark brows full of stern resolution, gazed towards the door, as if waiting what horror was to come next.

In the hands of some of the bolder slaves were the torches which gave light to the hall; and the moment Theodore entered, one started from the group, exclaiming, in tones of eager —ay, and affectionate inquiry—though they were but slaves, 'The Lady Flavia? Where is the Lady Flavia? Where is the Lady Flavia?'

He spoke as an old servant might speak to a boy whom he had known from infancy; but Theodore was no longer a boy; for, the last nine months and the last few hours together had made him a man in mind as well as in body, and he replied with that prompt tone of commanding courage which won instant obedience.

'She is safe!' he cried, gazing round him. 'Up, up, all of you! Lie not there in prostrate terror, herding together like sheep beneath the lightning. Up, if you would save your lives! Up, and away! You with the torches go before them! Out beyond the golden gate you will find your mistress and Aspar. Keep close to the walls till you are in the open fields! Another shock is coming, and the parapets and capitals fall first, but fall far out from the buildings. Crowd not together so, and crush each other in the doorway!—Out, coward! would you kill your fellows to save your own miserable life? So! quietly—but speedily. You, Cremera! and you, and you, Marton, come with me! You are brave and honest, and love your lady. Snatch up whatever jewels and valuable things you see, and follow quick! Where is Eudochia? Where my brother Ammian?'

'Her chamber is within the Lady Flavia's!' said the Arab Cremera; and, darting through the lesser doorway, Theodore hastened thither, followed by the three he had called, and one or two others, gathering up caskets,

and scrinia, and gold, and jewels, as they hurried through the more private apartments of the palace. A sound of murmuring voices was before him as he came near the chamber of Flavia; but dashing aside the curtain, he rushed in.

Kneeling upon the floor, as she had risen from her bed in terror, with her bright hair flowing in waving lines over her shoulders, her hands clasped, and her eyes raised to heaven as her lips trembled with prayer, was Eudochia; while beside her, fainting with terror, lay the negro girl who had sat beside the Hyader lately so gay and thoughtless. Near her stood Ammian, whose first impulse had been to seek her; but in whose dark imaginative eyes, instead of terror, shone a strange and almost sportive fire, as if his excited fancy felt a degree of pleasure even in a scene so full of danger and of horror. Nevertheless, he was eagerly entreating his fair *sister*, as he called her, to conquer her terrors, and to fly with him to seek their mother, exclaiming, 'Come, come, Eudochia, you shall pray to-morrow, or to-night, if you like it better, when once you are somewhere safe. Your prayers will go to heaven in but tattered garments, if they have to force their way through yon rift in the roof. Come, come!—Oh, here is Theodore! Where are my mother and Ildica?'

'Both safe!' replied Theodore. 'But this is no hour for sport, Ammian;' and, without question, he caught up his sister in his arms. 'You take the casket from Cremera, Ammian!' he continued. 'Let him take yon poor girl! Hark, there is a rushing sound! Quick, quick, it is coming again! On before, Ammian. On before, to the Golden Gate!'

Eudochia clung to his breast, and hurrying on with a step of light, he bore her through the many chambers of the building, till, turning through the great hall called the atrium, he entered one of the transverse streets, and paused a moment to listen if the sound continued. All, however, was still and dark, except where the murmur of voices and the rush of feet was heard from a distant spot, and where a number of torches appeared gathered together near the beautiful octagonal temple of Jupiter, or where from the apartments occupied by the old and incapable conservator of the palace were seen issuing forth two or three slaves with lights, and a solitary priest bearing the consecrated vessels of the Temple, which had already been converted to a Christian church.

Onward, in the same direction, Theodore now bore the fair light form of his sister; but ere he had reached the end of the street another awful phenomenon took place. From the midst of the intense, deep, black expanse which the sky now presented, burst forth an immense globe of fire, lighting with a fearful splendour the gigantic masses, columns, and towers of the palace, showing the neighbouring hills and woods beyond the gates, and even displaying the heavy piles of mountains that lay towering up toward the north. No thunder accompanied the meteor; and its progress through the sky was only marked by a sound as of a strong but equal wind, till suddenly it burst and dispersed with a tremendous crash, leaving all in deeper darkness than before.

The sight had made the multitude pause, and fall upon their knees before the church; and as Theodore approached, he heard a voice exclaiming: 'Let us die here! We may as well end our days here as in the open fields! Let us die here!'

But, to his surprise, the next moment, the calm sweet tones of the Lady Flavia struck his ear, replying to the words which she had heard too. 'No, my friends, no!' she said, in a voice which had now no terror in its sound, but was all calm, but energetic tenderness. 'No; it is our duty to God, to ourselves, to our brethren, to our children, to take the means of safety which are at hand. Let us fly quick from amongst these buildings which another shock may cast down to crush us. There may be dangers even beyond the walls, but here are certain perils. Let us go forth; I came back but to seek my children! Lo! they have come in safety, and let us now depart. Oh! delay not, pause not, for the hesitation of terror more often points the dart and sharpens the sword that slays us, than the rashness of courage. Come, my friends, let us come. God will protect us; let us take the means he gives. Come, my Theodore, come! Ammian, you look as your father used to look when he went forth to battle. Should not such a face as that shame terror, my friends? Come, I pray ye, come!'

Even as she spoke, the same hollow rushing sound was again heard; the steps on which she stood above the rest shook beneath her, and Ammian, seizing her hand, hurried forward. Clouds of dust rose up into the air, shrieks of terror burst from the very lips that had so lately proposed to remain and die there, and every one now rushed towards the gate. But their steps were staggering and unequal, for the solid earth was again shaken, the buildings and the columns were seen tottering and bending by the light of the torches; the crash of falling masses blended with the roar of the earthquake; part of the frieze of the temple was dashed into the midst of the group of slaves who were flying on before their mistress, and one amongst them was struck down.

'Stop!' said the voice of Flavia; 'let us not leave any one we can save. Hold the

torch here!' But it was in vain. The man was crushed like a trodden worm!

'God receive thy spirit in His mercy, through Christ!' cried the priest, and they rushed on, while still the earthquake seemed to roll the ground in waves beneath their feet; and their eyes grew dim and dizzy with the drunken rocking of the enormous buildings, through the midst of which they passed. The gate, though not far, seemed to take an age to reach, and joyful was the heart of every one as they drew near. But just as they were about to go forth, the struggling of the feverish earth appeared to reach its height; and one of those colossal flanking towers, which seemed destined to outlast a thousand generations, swayed to and fro like a young heart sorely tempted between virtue and crime, and then fell overthrown, with a sound like thunder, across the very path of the fugitives. It left a chasm where it had stood however, and through that rugged breach the terrified multitude took their way, stumbling and falling over the convulsed and quivering masses of stone.

Glad, glad were all bosoms when those walls were passed; and though still the ground heaved beneath their feet, though the roar continued, and the very trees were heard to crack and shiver as they passed along, yet all felt that some hope of safety was gained; though when they looked around, and saw the black and tangible darkness that covered the whole earth, and hid every object except that on which the occasional torchlight fell—when they gazed, I say, into that dull and vacant unreplying blank, and heard the hollow roaring voice of the earthquake around, below, above, well might their hearts still sink, and well might many a one amongst them think that the predicted day of general dissolution had at length arrived.

Still carrying his sister in his arms, Theodore had followed Flavia and Ammian through the broken walls; and it was not till their feet trod the more secure ground beyond, that he asked, 'Where is Ildica, my mother?'

'Here at hand, upon the hill, my noble Theodore,' she answered. 'Eudochia now is safe,' she added; 'leave her with me, and give our dear Ildica tidings of our escape, for she promised not to quit the spot where I left her till my return. Yon faint spot of light upon the old tumulus—that is Aspar's torch.'

Theodore placed his sister on her feet beside Flavia, and hurried on. He had no light with him; the heavens and the earth were all in darkness, and the roar of the last shock still rang, though more faintly, in the air. Yet, ere he had arrived within the feeble and indistinct glare of the slaves's torch, the quickened ear of love and apprehension had caught the sound, and recognised the tread of his coming feet; and in a moment Ildica was in his arms, and her fair face buried on his throbbing bosom.*

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE EVIL TIDINGS.

THE horrors of that night had not yet ended; for from the third hour after sunset till day had fully dawned, the fever of the earth raged with unabated fury. A melancholy and a ghastly group was it that soon crowned the hill where Flavia had left her daughter, when at length all those who had escaped with her from the palace were collected together round the torches. Not one half of those, indeed, who dwelt in the magnificent building to which that earthquake gave the first severe blow, had assembled in the train of the Roman lady; but during the pause of nearly an hour, which succeeded the second shock, many pale and terrified beings, some wounded and bruised with the falling masses, some nearly deprived of reason by their fears, wandered up from the palace and the neighbouring village, guided by the lights upon the hill, and with wild exclamations and bemoanings of their fate added something to the horrors of the moment.

Gradually the brief-spoken or almost silent awe subsided during that long interval of calm; and many who had been waiting with sinking hearts for the coming of a third shock began to talk together in low whispers, and even to fancy that the hour of peril had passed by. Gradually, too, serving to encourage such thoughts, the clouds rolled away; the stars looked out calm and bright, and the moon was seen just sinking into the Adriatic, but with a red and angry glow over her face, in general so calm and mild. Hope began to waken once again in all bosoms; and one more rash than the rest, a fisherman from Aspalathus, ventured down the hill, declaring that he would go and see what had befallen his boat.

The minutes seemed hours; but very few had elapsed, after his departure, ere the fierce rushing sound of the destroyer was again heard; again the earth reeled and shook, and

* In 'The Story of Azimantium,' which I published about six years ago in Blackwood's Magazine, and which has since been republished in 'The Desultory Man,' I gave very nearly the same account of this great earthquake with that here given. The actors and the scene are different; but the principal facts, being founded on historical truth, are the same.

yawned and heaved up, and burst like bubbles from a seething caldron, and lightning, without a cloud, played round the hills and over the waves. The terrified multitude clung together, and the sick faintness of despair seemed to defy all augmentation, when the voice of the fisherman was heard exclaiming, as he hastened back up the hill, 'Fly farther, to the mountains! fly farther up! the sea is rising over the land; the boats are driven into the market-place; the palace will soon be covered! Fly farther, and fly quickly, if you would save your lives!'

'Why should we fly?' cried the same voice which had before urged the multitude to stay and await death below; and at the same time a tall gaunt man, with long streaming grey hair, and large, wild, melancholy eyes, pushed himself forward into the torchlight. 'Why should we fly?' he cried, 'and whither can we go to hide us from the wrath of God? Lo, I tell you, and it shall come to pass, that no sun shall ever rise again upon this earth except the sun of righteousness. The last day, the last great day, is at hand, and in vain ye say to the mountains: "Fall upon us, and to the hills, Cover us, in the great and terrible day of the Lord." Make ready your hearts, and prepare your souls,' for verily ye are called to judgment, and the Son of Man is coming, in clouds and glory, to separate the sheep from the goats.'

His words, his solemn gestures, his wild and enthusiastic look, supported by his reputed sanctity of life, plunged the people in deeper despair; but Flavia again interposed, and with sweet and gentle, yet dignified and commanding, eloquence, she won the people to hear, to yield, and to obey her. Lighted by a single torch, for those they had brought had burned so far that it became necessary to spare them, the melancholy procession wound up the road, which led over the mountains towards Titurum. After travelling for at least a mile, with a continual ascent, they again paused; and in order both to give new courage to the sinking hearts of those who accompanied her, and to prevent the enthusiast Mizetus from adding to their terrors, the lady besought the good priests of the palace church to guide them in praying to the Almighty in their hour of peril.

The old man had not spoken since they left the city; but the mild words of the Roman lady seemed to wake him from the stupor of anguish and terror into which he had fallen. Called upon to find words of consolation for the flock committed to his charge, he applied them first to his own heart, and instantly remembering the hopes and promises of a pure and exalted faith, he broke forth in a strain of powerful eloquence, now directing the people to put their trust in that Almighty arm which can save in the time of the most awful danger; now raising his voice in prayer to God, mingling adoration with petition, and offering at once the sacrifice of faith and supplication.

The people gathered round, slaves and freemen together, lifting their pale faces and anxious eyes by the dull torchlight to the countenance of the priest. They gained confidence and courage, however, at his words; and when he began his prayer, they knelt around upon the still shaking earth, and rose again with hearts full of trust, calmed and strengthened by devotion. None had stood aloof, not even those who had hitherto remained firm to their ancient idolatry. In that hour of horror, they felt the need of some higher hope and more abiding trust, and they kneeled with the rest to that more mighty God whom hitherto they had not known.

Ere they rose, a light and grateful wind sprang up from the mountains; and, with hope once more awakened, in a still dark and superstitious age, even so slight a change as that was received as a favourable presage. Many there were who regarded it as a sign that their prayers were heard; and when at length the calm grey dawn began to look from the eastern hills upon the wearied and anxious groups below, though the earth still shook, from time to time, with a convulsive shudder, the sight of the blessed light of returning day seemed to take the worst apprehension from their over-loaded hearts, and many an eye shed tears of joy, to see again those rays which they had feared were obscured for ever.

Rashness generally follows terror allayed; and scarcely had the sun fully risen, when numbers, anxious for friends whom they saw not—or, perhaps, with more sordid motives—began to hasten away towards the village and the palace. But the earth still shook, and Flavia, with her family and servants, still remained upon the hill, after striving anxiously to persuade the rest to wait till all was again completely still. Her reasoning was in vain, however, and troop after troop went off; but scarcely was the day an hour old, when another severe shock was felt, and many who had escaped the dangers of that fearful night were crushed or maimed in the ruins of the dwellings to which they had returned. That shock was the last, as it was the longest, which was felt, and when it subsided, all remained quiet; and though the ground was seen yawning in various places, though parts even of the mountains had slipped from their places, and rocks lay overthrown in the valleys; though the courses of the streams had been altered, and the whole face of the land was changed; yet it soon became evident that the earthquake was over, and mourning was all that remained—mourning unmingled with fear.

There was mourning in the hearts of all; and yet how many a glad embrace, how many a tender and affectionate caress, how many a prayer and thanksgiving, expressed the gratitude, the joy, the love, which filled the bosoms of Flavia and her family! How many an earnest and a wistful glance at the faces of each other told that, in the anguish of that long horrible night, selfish fear had been superseded by apprehensions of a nobler kind!

Bright and beautiful, calm and serene, the day rose up over that scene of desolation and ruin, smiling as if to give comfort and consolation to the smitten earth; but still Flavia lingered on the hills, unwilling to trust her children or her domestics amidst the ruins of the palace, till she should be well assured that safety might be found within its walls. As the sun grew hot, however, she removed to the edge of a small wood of tall ilexes which hung upon the edges of the mountain road, though many of the finest trees had been uprooted and thrown down either by the wind or the earthquake; and having placed herself beneath the shade, with her children round her, several of the slaves ran hither and thither, to seek some food whereof to offer their well-loved mistress the morning's meal. Each returned with something; but each had some sad tale to tell of the ravages that were to be traced in the direction in which he had gone. Milk and wine and early fruits had been found in abundance amongst the various cottages in the neighbourhood, and a meal, plentiful, but simple as that of the night before, was spread upon the grass beneath the trees.

The earth was still, the air was fresh and sweet, and the birds had begun again their melody, forgetting in song, like the happy heart of youth, the blow of calamity as soon as it had passed away. All tended to soothe and to reassure; and the heart of Ammian, which, even during the terrible scenes of the past night had not lost its bold and fearless daring, now broke out in light and wild fancies. He would know the causes of the earthquake; and when he found that neither his mother nor Theodore could give a satisfactory reply to all his many questions—as who in that age could have furnished any on such a theme?—he let his imagination run wild in conjectures; and many a bright poetical theory he formed, and many a wild and baseless hypothesis he raised, sporting with all the dread images of the past like a child playing with the weapons of deadly strife gathered from a field of battle.

Then he urged his mother to return quickly to the palace, in order, as he said, to see what old Ocean had been doing there during their absence. With Theodore, Flavia held more rational intercourse, taking counsel with him as to what course she had to pursue, and expressing an apprehension lest the palace, left totally unguarded, might be plundered during her absence and that of the old imperial conservator, who remained with them, his senses still bewildered with all the terrors he had gone through. Theodore, however, showed her that the faithful slaves who had followed him through the building had brought away all the valuable jewels, caskets, and gold which they had found, and for the rest, he offered to return himself with the conservator and some of the slaves, and provide for the preservation of the palace and all that it contained.

'Go you with the rest to Salona, dearest mother,' he said: 'some dwellings must there have been preserved; and amongst the merchants and traders which it contains you will always find shelter and assistance for gold. Shaken as the palace has been, many parts may yet be standing which will soon fall, and your presence would only be dangerous, and embarrass us in ascertaining the state of the building. I will accompany you part of the way to Salona, and then turn round by the heathen cemetery towards Aspalathus and the palace.'

Ildica listened, and her look seemed to say that she would fain accompany him; for hers was one of those hearts which would rather, far rather, take part in the danger and the grief of those they love than share even their happiest hours. But she said nothing: for she knew that her wishes ought not to be granted, and she would neither put her mother nor her lover to the pain of opposing her even by a word.

Eudochia, however, in the inconsiderate apprehensiveness of girlhood, clung to her brother, and besought him not to go; but Theodore soon pacified her, assuring her that he would not venture rashly where danger was apparent; and, after a few more words, orders were given to the domestics, and Flavia rose to proceed towards Salona. Weariness, indeed, was in all limbs; and with slow and heavy steps, those who had remained with Flavia on the uplands took their way along a road, which wound for some distance over the ridge of hills nearest to the sea and then descended, separating into two branches, the one leading to the town of Salona, the other to Aspalathus and the neighbouring palace. The latter branch, with a steep declivity, wound down the hill, bordered on either hand by a long row of tall dark cypresses which reached from the northern gate of the palace to a cemetery on the side of the hill. In that burial ground, surrounded by a low wall not two feet high—thus built that all who passed might gaze upon

the records of mortality within—lay crowded a multitude of tombs, checkered with groups of dull funereal trees. There reposed the remains of all who had died in the vicinity since Dalmatia had become a Roman province, and the frequent *Siste viator!* called the eye, and recorded the vain attempt to teach mankind wisdom and moderation from the common lot of all.

It was near this burial-place, just where the roads parted, that Theodore paused, and, after a few minutes' conference with the old officer of the palace, selected several of the slaves to accompany him on his way. But just as he was about to depart, the eye of Ildica rested upon a cloud of dust that rose from the point where the road towards Salona became first visible, emerging from a thick grove at the distance of perhaps half a mile from the spot where they then stood.

'Look! look!' she said; 'here are people coming up from the city—perhaps to give us assistance; and I trust they may bring a chariot or a litter, for my mother is pale and weary, and Eudochia is faint also.'

'And you are weary, too, my Ildica!' said her mother. 'But look! Theodore, look! Do you not see armour and helmets glittering through the dust in the sun? It seems a turma of cavalry or more, for the line is long. Stay with us, my dear son, till we see what we have here: let us turn into this field opposite the cemetery while they pass by.'

Her words were instantly obeyed as commands; and, winding on with a slow equal march, a small body of horse, followed by a number of stragglers on foot, ascended the hill, and then, without pause or question, took the way on towards Aspalathus. In a moment after, however, at a quicker pace, as if to overtake them, and followed by a number of soldiers and attendants, came a superior person, who paused on seeing the group seated in the neighbouring meadow, and sent a messenger to ask if much mischief had occurred at the palace in consequence of the earthquake, and whether the Lady Flavia were safe.

'She is well, and present,' replied Flavia to the messenger; 'who is it that sends?'

'The military tribune, Marcian,' replied the attendant, and Theodore instantly sprang up, exclaiming, 'My father's dear and noble friend!' and without other comment he ran down the field. As soon as the tribune beheld him he leapt from his horse and pressed him in his arms, and after a few brief words gave some orders to his attendants, and advanced with Theodore to the spot where Flavia sat.

He was a man already in the middle stage of life, tall and powerful in frame, and of mild, but firm and serious, countenance. He was not, perhaps, what would generally be reputed handsome, but his features were good; and there was the fire of genius in his large dark eye, and consciousness of energy on his broad square brow. Dignity was in his aspect and his whole demeanour; and, as he saluted the Lady Flavia, lamented with her the events of the preceding night, and inquired in tones of deep interest into all the perils through which she and her family had passed, there was that calm and graceful suavity in his deportment which inexpressibly won and struck every one who listened. Nevertheless, there was a cloud, as if of some deep melancholy, hung upon his brow; and when Flavia informed him of her purpose of proceeding to Salona, he shook his head mournfully, saying, 'You had better not, lady! I think you had better not! It is a melancholy place,' he added a moment after; 'much shaken and ruined, and a great number of people have lost their lives there. I fear that accounts from other parts of the empire will be sad indeed.'

There was something gloomy and thoughtful in the manner of the tribune that surprised and somewhat alarmed the Roman lady; for so much habitual self-command had the soldiers of the empire, that it was rare to see any one, especially of such rank and renown as Marcian, display upon the occasion of any misfortune like the earthquake, the natural feelings which were not the less busy at their hearts. The marble exterior of the old republicans was much affected by all who sought to distinguish themselves in the Roman armies; and Marcian was famed for a temperate but unyielding firmness, which admitted not the semblance of grief or apprehension.

'Think you, then,' she asked, 'that we had better return to the palace? A report reached us in the night that the sea had nearly covered it.'

Marcian paused for several minutes, as if meditating what were best to do, and then replied, 'Lady, I will send to see the condition of the palace, and in the meantime bid them pitch me a tent here to give you shelter from the sun. We have provisions with us, too, and can offer you a meal, such as, perhaps, this great disaster may not have left at Aspalathus.'

'I thank you,' replied Flavia, 'we have already eaten. We found no want of food amongst the cottages upon the hills.'

But Marcian pressed upon them his hospitality so earnestly, that Flavia yielded, feeling that there was something more beneath his grave and thoughtful air than he suffered at first to appear; and while the tent was being raised by his attendants, he sent a messenger to the palace, with orders for such minute

examination as showed that the day would be high ere he could return. Food already dressed was soon spread out under the tent; and one or two vessels of wine were produced, with several rich cups and vases, carved with the exquisite workmanship of an earlier age, and shining with many a precious stone. With grave suavity the tribune did the honours of the meal, and spoke much, and of many things, but with a wandering and discursive spirit, as if his mind was forcing itself to the task, and seeking more largely the aid of imagination than might have been the case had the heart been itself at ease.

'How magnificent are those cypresses!' he said, looking towards the long avenue which led down the hill, 'I never beheld finer, except, perhaps, some that grow on the hill above Byzantium. But those stand solitary, as if to mark the tomb of some warrior who has died afar from his own land; these sweep down in a long row, like a line of departed monarchs seen in the shady grandeur of tradition. There they stood, centuries before Diocletian laid the first stone of his palace; there they stand now, when his history is almost forgotten; there they will stand, when we are as he is. Well are they placed between the palace and the sepulchre—those witnesses of the mortality of ages. The common lot of man! why should any one shrink from the common lot of man? Why should we look with hope to this world's future, or turn back our eyes with lingering grief to the past, or nurse bright hopes of such young beings as these,' and he laid his hand upon the head of Ammian, 'or mourn with bitter regret for those who have changed the thorny couch of mortal life for the calm bed of the tomb? Give me a cup of wine!'

'A prodigy! a prodigy!' cried one of the slaves, running into the tent; 'an omen! an omen! Tribune, the eagle, which has hovered over us all the way from Salona, has settled on the pole of the tent!'

'Get ye gone!' replied Marcian; 'what have I to do with omens? I may have the heart, without the wings of the eagle. Out upon ambition! and yet this very Diocletian, who founded the palace hard by, was a slave before he was an emperor. But he loathed, resigned, and refused to resume the power which he had acquired and proved. The eagle haunts me: twice has it hovered for hours over me while sleeping in the open field, and now it settles on my tent. These are strange accidents, and yet nothing more than accidents. Who should dream of ambition with those tombs before his eyes?—Give me some wine!'

The attendant who stood near handed the goblet, which he had held ready filled for some minutes, to his master; and Marcian,* yet but half a Christian, turned and poured some of the wine upon the ground. 'To the dead!' he said, look mournfully round him, 'to the dead!' and his eyes fixed full and sadly upon Theodore.

The youth started suddenly on his feet, and grasped the tribune's hand, exclaiming, 'My father! I adjure thee tell me! What of my father?'

Marcian threw his arms round the slighter form of his young friend, speaking some words in a low tone. Flavia rose and gazed eagerly in the face of the tribune, who shook his head mournfully as his reply; and Theodore hid his face in his mantle, while Eudochia burst into wild and weeping lamentations. Ildica's dark eyes overflowed in silence; and though Flavia let not one drop roll over the jetty fringes of her eyelids, her pale cheek grew paler, and her lip quivered with intense emotion. Marcian said no more, but gazed down sternly upon the hilt of his sword; and the only words that were uttered for some time were, 'Alas, Paulinus!' which broke from the lips of Ammian.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### THE DEPARTURE.

It was a long and dreary pause; but at length the stern and virtuous soldier, who, ere many more years had passed, seated himself without crime or bloodshed in the chair of the Cæsars, laid his hand upon the arm of Theodore, with a firm but kindly pressure which spoke at once to a heart full of high feelings and of noble energies, and roused it from the dull stupor of sudden grief.

'Oh, Marcian!' exclaimed the youth, 'this is an unexpected stroke! So short a while since I saw him depart full of vigour, and life, and happiness. So short, so common a journey—so easy—so safe! How, tell me how this has befallen? Was it by sickness, or accident, or war with some rebel, or in the chase of some wild beast?'

'Alas, no!' replied Marcian; 'it was by none of these, my son. Nor would I wound your young heart afresh, by telling how it did take place, were it not absolutely necessary for you to know your father's fate, in order

* He was at this time, probably, an Arian; but there is reason to believe that his family had long held their ancient religion, against all the decrees of the Christian emperors.

that you may gain an augury or a warning of your own, and timely prevent it.'

'The emperor,' cried Flavia, 'the emperor has destroyed his faithful friend: Paulinus saw it before he went. Every line of his last letter breathes the anticipation of his coming fate. He saw it in the gloomy brow of Theodocius; he saw it in the smile of Chrysapheus; he felt that he was going, never to return. Say, tribune, say! was it not the emperor's deed?'

'Even so!' replied Marcian. 'By the order of him whom he had served with unequalled fidelity and truth—the friend of his schoolboy hours, the companion of his high and noble studies—by the hands of those he thought his friends—hands that had been plighted to him in affection, and raised with his in battle—at his own social board, and in the hour of confiding tranquillity—was slain Paulinus, leaving not a nobler nor a better behind.'

Theodore again shed tears, but Flavia asked eagerly, 'The cause, tribune! What was the cause, or, rather, what the pretext for cause? Reasonable cause there could be none for dooming to death one of the purest, noblest, least ambitious men that the world has ever yet seen.'

'The cause was jealousy, lady,' replied Marcian; 'a cause that leads men ever to wild and madlike actions. In the gardens of the Cæsars, near their eastern capital, is a solitary tree which bears fruit rarely, but when it does, produces an apple like that which hung in the garden of the children of Hesperus—small in size, golden in colour, and ambrosial to the taste. Paulinus had bestowed on Eudoxia a book, containing poems of Sappho, which no other manuscript can produce; and the empress, in return, had sportively promised her husband's friend the rarest thing that she could find to bestow. The tree of which I spoke had in the past autumn produced but one apple, and that was sent, on the entrance of the new year, by Theodosius to Eudoxia. She, in thoughtless innocence, sent it as the rarest of all things to Paulinus, and Chrysapheus took good heed that the fact should reach the emperor's ears, distorted to his purpose. Fury seized upon the heart of Theodosius; but the base eunuch had sufficient skill and power to make him conceal his suspicions and his hatred, for Chrysapheus well knew that an open accusation might produce a bold and successful defence. Paulinus was sent to Cæsarea; and there, unheard, without trial and without justice, was put to death!'

'Tyrant!' muttered Theodore. 'Base, ungrateful tyrant!'

'Let your indignation swallow up your grief, my Theodore!' replied Marcian; 'but let it not injure your country. Great as it is, great as it well may be, still greater will it become when you hear that Valens, your father's bosom friend, has been since sacrificed for no other crime than his love for Paulinus; that several of your household slaves have been slain by the emperor's orders; and that all the wealth of Paulinus has been bestowed upon Chrysapheus!'

Theodore again started up, exclaiming—'I swear by all my hopes, and by my father's spirit——'

But Marcian caught his arm. 'Swear nothing against your country, my son,' he cried; 'Theodore, we have need of every Roman!'

'Hear me! hear me!' cried Theodore. 'Naught against my country. No, never, let the temptation be what it may, will I draw the sword against Rome. So help me the God in whom I trust. But should ever the time come when this hand can reach a tyrant, or a tyrant's minister, it shall doom him to death as remorselessly as he has doomed my noble father;' and having spoken, he cast himself down, and again covered his face in his mantle.

Never, perhaps, through all the long tragic records of human woes and sufferings which the past, the sad and solemn past, holds in its melancholy treasury—never was there yet a scene in which the dark feeling of desolation penetrated more deeply into every bosom than in the one which surrounded the tribune Marcian. The horrors, the fatigues, the destruction of the preceding night, had laid every heart prostrate in the general calamity; and when the blow of individual grief fell heavy upon all alike, it seemed to crush and trample out in every breast the last warm kindly hopes—the last bright delusions of our phantasm-like existence.

Flavia gazed on her children, and on the orphans, in deep melancholy; while Theodore, with his face buried in his robe, sat apart, and Eudochia hid her streaming eyes upon her adoptive mother's lap. Ildica, with clasped hands, and cheeks down which the large bright tears rolled slow, now gazed upon her young and mourning lover; now turned an inquiring, anxious, longing glance towards Marcian, who, on his part, again, with knitted brow and downcast eyes, sat in the midst, stifling emotions which struggled hard against control. Even the slaves of Flavia and Paulinus, amongst whom the news had spread, gathered round the open tent, and, standing wrapped up in their dark penulæ, gazed with mournful and sympathising looks upon the sad group beneath its shade; while mingled amongst them, here and there, were seen some of the stout soldiers who had accompanied the tribune, evidently sharing, notwithstanding all their own habits

of danger and suffering, and their frequent familiarity with death itself, in the grief of the young and hapless beings before them.

One only of the party seemed occupied with other thoughts, and yet the seeming belied him. Ammian, reclining by the side of the little sandy path which crossed the meadow where they sat, seemed busy, in his usual abstracted manner, in tracing figures on the dust. One of the soldiers moved across to see what he was employed in, and by that action drew the attention of Marcian, whose eyes turned thither too; when, to his surprise, he beheld, written in the Greek character, upon the sand:

'Death to all tyrants! The blood of the guilty for the blood of the innocent! Vengeance for Paulinus!'

Rising at once, he set his foot upon the writing ere the slower soldier could decipher what it meant; and then, raising his finger to Ammian, he said with emphasis, 'Beware!'

The boy looked up in his face, and answered calmly, 'I will beware, most noble Marcian!' But there was meaning in his eyes, and Marcian chose not to urge his wild and daring spirit farther.

Seating himself again by Flavia's side, the tribune, with the calm gentleness of a compassionate heart, endeavoured to soothe the pain which it had been his bitter task to inflict; and when he had, in a degree, succeeded in gaining attention, he gave some orders to the soldiers, and spoke some words to the slaves, which caused them to retire from the vicinity of the tent.

'Listen to me, Theodore,' he said, 'listen to me, noble lady! Grief has had its part; other duties call for your consideration. I would fain ask you, sweet Flavia, whither you now propose to turn your steps; what plan you now propose to follow?'

'We proposed,' replied Flavia, after a moment's hesitation, 'to go forward to Salona; there to wait, if we could find a refuge, till the palace was again rendered habitable, or till we could send those things which may be necessary to our own villa upon the mountains. I have not dwelt in it since my husband's death, but if it be necessary I can conquer memory.'

'To Salona!' replied Marcian, musing, 'to Salona! It is true, you could easily fly thence in case of necessity to Ravenna; but Valentinian, if report has informed me rightly, loves you not, and might avenge himself by giving you up to Theodosius!'

Flavia gazed earnestly in the tribune's countenance, as the new and painful conviction of fresh dangers broke upon her. 'More sorrows!' she said, 'more, more to be endured! Think you, then, noble Marcian, that we are in danger at Salona? Think you, then, that Theodosius will extend his persecution even to us, innocent as we are?'

'He has already slain one as innocent as any of us, lady,' replied the tribune, 'and he has given up to the sword one friend and many of the slaves of him who is gone. Do you believe, then, that he will spare the cousin of one whom he hated—a cousin who was loved as a sister? Can you trust to his stopping short with the father, and not carrying on his vengeance to the son?'

'Oh that I were in his palace!' cried Theodore; 'oh that I were in his hall, and before his throne!'

But Flavia answered more calmly, 'Tell us all our danger, tribune. Give your kind and generous advice. You are known as wise and good, as well as brave and skilful. We will give our actions into your hands for guidance. You shall shape our course as you think fit.'

'Lady,' replied Marcian, in a tone which, notwithstanding all his command over himself, showed how much his heart was moved, —lady, I loved Paulinus as a brother. He was wise and eloquent, learned and brave, and I am but the son of a common soldier, nurtured in camps, and educated in the rude field. Yet between my heart and his there were common feelings; and in the course of our various lives we chained our souls together by mutual benefits: may his shade find Elysium! When I heard of what had befallen, my first thought was of my friend's children. My cohort was in Dalmatia, my time of command approaching; and though I had been called to the capital by the imperial mandate, I prepared to come hither with all speed. While I so prepared, I heard of the death of Valens and the slaves, and doubted not that the cup might next pass to me. I presented myself before the emperor to know at once my doom, but he contented himself with commanding me to come hither, and lead the troops instantly into Thrace. Another cohort, under the command of Strator, the bitter enemy of Paulinus, is ordered hither instantly to regulate—such is the pretext—the line of frontier with the messengers of Valentinian. Lady, I fear me there may be other purposes to execute; and I have hastened, without pause or rest, to bring you tidings, which, sad as they are, might have been crowned with bitterer still, if I had not been the messenger—to bring you such tidings, and to take counsel with you for your safety. My opinion, indeed, my advice, is little worthy of your having; but still, let us consult together, and—as far as my duty as a soldier and a Roman will permit—let me be a brother to the Lady Flavia, a father to my dead friend's orphans.'

'Your advice will be as wise as your heart is kind,' replied Flavia. 'Oh! give it us, my

friend! give it to us fully and openly. We will be guided by it unless there be reasons against it which even you yourself shall approve. If safety be not to be found in Illyricum, whither would you have us go?'

'To the extreme limits of the empire!' replied Marcian. 'What matters it to you what the land be called which you inhabit for a few short years? what matters it if the north wind blow somewhat more coldly than in this golden land. If winter wear a ruder aspect, and the flowers and fruits linger for the summer sun, ere they bloom and ripen?'

'What matters it, indeed!' said Flavia. 'We love this scene, tribune—well and dearly do we love this glorious scene—but we love it more from the tender memories that have been attached to it, than even for its sunny splendour and its face of beauty. But now the thunder which has stricken us has turned the sweet and fruity wine which filled our cup to sour and hateful dregs. Another land will be brighter in our sight. Freedom from a tyrant's neighbourhood shall supply the place of beauties that we leave behind; the absence of objects that recall our griefs shall compensate for those that once awoke our joys; peace shall be our atmosphere of balm, security our sunshine. What say you, Theodore?'

'Let us go, my mother,' replied the youth; 'where you and Ildica, Ammian and Eudochia are with me, shall be my country. The tyrant has smitten down one object of my love, but he is powerless over my capability of loving: that which was parted is now all concentrated. You will go with me, my Ildica: is it not so? and my father's blessing—the blessing of the dead—shall follow, and comfort us in exile. But whither would you direct our course, noble Marcian?'

'Towards the banks of the Danube,' he replied. 'There, at the extreme verge of the Imperial territory, the power of Theodosius waxes weak, and is exercised with difficulty. There, too, if mad and persevering jealousy drive him still to seek your hurt, ten steps place you beyond his reach, where the feeble and degenerate Cæsar dare not stretch a hand to grasp you: your father's brother dwells at Margus, bishop of the place.'

Theodore's countenance fell. 'He was indeed the brother of my father's blood,' he answered; 'but was never the brother of his love. Grasping, avaricious, crafty, I have heard my father say that Eugenius has the talents, but not the virtues, of a Roman.'

'Yet with him,' replied Marcian, 'are you sure of a safer asylum than with any one else. Even at this moment he is at enmity with the court of Theodosius, and bears a mortal hatred to Chrysapheus, who had wronged him, abandoned him, and, notwithstanding the pleading of your father in his behalf, would have willingly given him up to the barbarians. With him you will find safety; I must not say you will find vengeance, but it may be so.'

'Let us go!' cried Theodore; 'let us go, my mother! The gold and jewels which, unwitting of all this, I made the Numidians carry forth last night, will render the journey lighter to you, dear mother; and if my uncle, careful of his wealth, refuse to give me support, I will find means to win it for myself.'

'Fear not for that,' replied Marcian; 'your father's wealth, Theodore, is gone, but his estates are yours; and even Theodosius dares not openly take from you that which no law has sentenced you to lose. Strange that he who unquestioned takes a life unjustly should not have power to seize your land, and yet it is so. Now, lady, let me send once more to the palace, and bid them bring forth all that your treasury contains. Take with you all your movable wealth; for if you do not so guard yourself, it will fall into hands which render no account. I will bid them, too, bring forth whatever litters and carriages they find, to bear you less weary on the way; and ere two days be over, I will follow, and rejoining you, protect you from harm, till, on the frontiers of Mœsia, I must leave you and march on. At all events, my presence and my troops will insure your safety so far; and even after that, I shall be interposed between you and your enemies, so that no messenger of evil can pass without my learning his purpose, delaying his journey, and giving you timely tidings. Speed, however, matters much, and now I would have you set forth without a day's delay.'

Flavia sought not to procrastinate, for though many a clinging memory attached her to those scenes by the fine filmy ties of associations which even the sharp edge of grief could not cut, yet the safety of Theodore, the happiness of her own child, the enfranchisement from a state of society where virtue was no safeguard, and justice afforded no shield, were objects too dear and high to be risked by delay. Few and melancholy were the words that now passed, but the orders of Marcian were promptly obeyed; and though he would suffer neither Flavia nor Theodore to return, even for an hour, to the palace, knowing far more of the cruel orders which Theodosius had already given against them than he chose to communicate, yet a number of their domestics were sent thither with his soldiers to remove all that belonged to either family in the building.

Ere the sun had passed the meridian more than an hour, all who had been sent had returned, and many and curious were the objects which now surrounded that sad group by the side of the cemetery. A number of mules and horses were there; the black charger which

had carried Paulinus in his last victory over the Alani, and which had never been ridden since by any one but himself; the white horses which drew the low carriage called *pilentum*, wherein Flavia was accustomed to drive along the margin of the sea; litters with their silver feet, and covered chairs of gold and ivory; rich caskets; leathern bags of gold and silver coin; and large quantities of silks and fine linens (then become general, but still considered costly), made up into packages of convenient sizes for carrying on the shoulders of the slaves, or placing on the beasts of burden, together with cups and vases of gold, silver, and precious stones; and slaves of all complexions and of every different feature. Everything, in short, which was usually collected in a wealthy and powerful Roman house, at that luxurious and extravagant period, was there scattered round in glittering profusion, giving that group the appearance of some caravan from Ophir or from Tyre reposing on its journey. Some confusion and some delay took place, though everything was arranged as quickly as possible, while Flavia looked on in calm sadness, and Theodore gazed upon the scene with burning indignation, unquenched by grief, making his lip still quiver, and his bright eye flash.

At length all was prepared, and with a few words of heartfelt thanks to Marcian, the lady placed herself with Ildica in one of the *lectulæ*, or litters; Eudochia and her chief attendant reclined in another. Ammian sprang upon a small Thracian horse, and Theodore mounted his father's charger. The noble beast, wild with unwearied strength, reared high and snorted fiercely, as he felt the light weight of the young Roman; but Theodore with skill and power soon curbed him to his will, and patted his proud neck, while a tear, given to the memory of him who was gone, wetted his eyelids. The whole party then moved on, winding back again along the path which they had trodden that very morning.

Their way lay over the hills, and for an hour they moved on, ascending gently, but without stopping, till at length, on the highest spot of the inferior acclivity, which lies at the foot of the higher mountains, Flavia bade the bearers stop, and gazed out of the litter upon the scene which she was quitting perhaps for ever. There it lay, robed in the same splendid sunshine which had adorned it on the preceding day. To the eyes which looked upon it not a change was to be seen. The palace, the village, the distant town of Salona, the beautiful bay, the golden islands which are scattered along the coast, the liquid sapphire in which they seemed to float, were all sleeping beneath the wanderers' glance in the drowsy heat of mid-day, looking calm and tranquil, as if nature herself imitated the hypocrisy of man, and covered with deceitful smiles the desolation which reigned within her bosom. The measured round of the sun had scarcely been accomplished, since those who now stood upon the hill-top, fugitives from their dear domestic hearths, had met together after separation, and had gazed over that same lovely prospect from the clump of cypresses which now lay beneath their eyes. Scarcely had one round of the sun been accomplished since standing there they had gazed upon that pageant-like scene of beauty, and had felt all its fair features reflected from the clear bright mirror of the happy heart. Scarcely had one round been accomplished since every splendid object that the eye could find, and every sweet sound that the ear could catch, in a spot and a moment when all was music and brightness, had seemed but an image, a type, a prophecy of joys and happiness and successes yet to come; and yet in that brief space, an earthquake had rent and torn that enchanted land, and had scattered ruin, desolation, and death, over its fair calm face:—in that brief space, from the bosoms of those who gazed upon it had been torn the bright joys of youth and inexperience; had been scattered the dear hopes and warm imaginings of innocent expectation; had been riven one of the dearest ties of human existence, the great band of the loving and the loved: for not one in that sad family but felt that the unjust fate of Paulinus had given a chilly coldness to their hearts—no, not one, from the youngest to the oldest. The young felt that the fresh bloom was gone for ever from the Hesperian fruit; the elder that the cropped flower of hope, which had again been beginning to blossom, had been once more crushed down, and never could bloom again.

Between their fate and the scene they gazed upon there seemed some fanciful affinity; each felt it, each lingered with fond regret to gather into one glance all the thousand lovely and beloved sights; each sighed as they gazed and thought of the '*For ever!*' and at length even from Flavia's eyes broke forth the long repressed tears.

The slaves stood round, and sympathised with those who mourned. Many a dark eye, and many a rough cheek, was moistened with the drops of kindly feeling, till at length the lady wiped her tears away, and waving her hand towards the valleys on the other side, said, 'Let us go on!'

Again they began to move, when the voices of two slaves broke forth in a mournful song, which they had probably often sung in their own remote land:

## SLAVE'S SONG.

I.

'We leave ye behind us, sweet things of the earth;
Our life's but a race to the death from the birth;
We pause not to gather the flowers as they grow,
The goal is before us, and on we must go!
We leave ye behind us, sweet things of the earth.

II.

'Fair scenes of our childhood, dear homes of our youth,
Memorials of innocence, virtue, and truth,
The land of our birth, the dear mother that bore—
We leave ye behind us, we see you no more!
We leave ye behind us, sweet things of the earth.

III.

'The joys that we tasted we taste not again;
Each hour has its burden, each day has its pain;
No moment in flying, but hurries us past
Some sight, sound, or feeling more dear than the last!
We leave ye behind us, sweet things of the earth.

IV.

'We leave ye behind us, and others shall come
To tread in our footsteps, from cradle to tomb;
Still gazing back fondly, with lingering eyes,
Where behind them the bright land of memory lies!
We leave ye behind us, sweet things of the earth.

V.

'The sound of Time's pinion, as fast as he doth fly,
Is echoed from each mortal breast by a sigh;
What if there be fruits?—they ungather'd must grow,
For fate is behind us, and on we must go!
We leave ye behind us, sweet things of the earth.

VI.

'We leave ye behind us, sweet things of the earth,
Hopes, joys, and endearments, sport, pleasure, and mirth,
Like a tempest-driven ship, sailing by some bright shore,
Time hurries us onward—we see you no more!
We leave ye behind us, sweet things of the earth.'

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE STRANGER.

It was in the calends of June, and yet the day had very few of the attributes of summer. The grey rain came down heavily from the dull leaden sky, the wind rushed in fierce gusts from the north-east, the stream of the Danube rolled dark and rapidly, and a melancholy murmur rose up from its waters while they hurried on to the gloomy Euxine, as if in reply to the sad and wailing voice of the breeze. The only thing that spoke the season of the year was the vivid verdure of the wide green pastures, and the rich blossoms that hung upon the frequent trees. Along the banks of the dark river, accompanied only by two freedmen on horseback, rode Theodore, the son of Paulinus, dressed in the deep mourning tunic and mantle of dark grey, with no ornament of any kind upon his person except at the hilt of his sword. The same black charger bore him with which he had departed from Dalmatia; and pressing the noble beast onward, he cast his eyes frequently to the opposite bank of the river.

At length he suddenly drew in his bridle, exclaiming, 'There is a raft, and if we can but make them hear we shall be secure. Dismount, Cremera; run to the margin, and shout loudly for the boatmen.'

The dark Arab, who, though rendered free by Flavia after the earthquake, at Theodore's request, still followed the fortunes of the young Roman with love elevated by liberty, sprang eagerly to the ground to obey; but, to the surprise of all, ere he had led down his horse to the shore, the raft, which they had seen moored to the opposite bank, was put in motion by two men who had been sitting near, under the shelter of the wood, that was there thick and tall. Onward it came, skilfully piloted across the stream, till it approached the shore, on which Theodore and his two followers now stood ready to embark.

At the distance of twenty or thirty cubits, however, the raft paused, and those who steered it gazed upon the young Roman and his attendants with apparent doubt and surprise. Theodore pressed them to come on; and then, perceiving that they were barbarians from the north, he spoke to them in one of those dialects which feelings connected with his mother's memory had made him learn and preserve, even amidst the gay amusements and deeper studies which had since had their share of his time. She it was who had first taught his infant tongue to pronounce those sounds so difficult for a Roman to utter: she it was who had used those northern words towards her boy, in the early language of affection and tenderness; and though she had died at a period of his life when the wax on the tablets of memory is soft, and impressions are too easily effaced, he had never forgotten the accents that he had so dearly loved. But now, that knowledge proved not a little serviceable. The barbarians looked up in surprise; and when he told them, in a language they understood, to bring near their

raft with speed, as delay might be dangerous to him, they hastened to approach the shore, and suffered him to lead his unwilling horse upon the fluctuating and unsteady raft.

One of the attendants followed; but the boatmen seemed to doubt whether their rude passage-boat would sustain the third man and horse; though the large trunks of trees whereof it was composed were farther supported by skins blown out like bladders. Theodore, however, would not leave one behind; and, though sinking deep in the water, the raft still bore them all up.

Floating heavily upon the rushing stream, it reached the other bank of the Danube, and a piece of gold repaid the service of the boatmen; but though, when the foot of Theodore touched the barbaric land, he felt the thrill of security and freedom at his heart, yet, as he mounted his horse, and gazed upon the scene before him, he paused with a sensation of doubt and awe. The bank of the river, where he stood, was clothed with smooth green turf; but both farther up and lower down the stream might be seen high rocks; and at the distance of about a hundred yards from the margin rose up, dark, tall, and gloomy, the forest covering of primeval earth. The proximity of those mighty trees prevented the eye from discovering aught beyond them, except where the ground sloped down towards the west; but there, even, no promise of a more open country was given: for over the first forest line, at its lowest point, might be seen a wide extent of dark grey wood, rounded, and waving with an interminable ocean of leaves and branches.

The desolate aspect of the wilderness fell chill upon the heart of the young Roman; and though his resolution to pursue his way on that side of the river was not to be shaken, yet many a difficulty and a danger, he too well knew, lay before him. Through some part of that wood, he was aware, had been cut a military road, when the Romans had been indeed the sovereigns of the world; but since that time centuries had passed, and the inhabitants of the country had changed: a thousand uncivilised tribes filled the land which the people of the Imperial city had once possessed; and all her magnificent works had been destroyed, or neglected, beyond the mere frontier of the diminished empire. Theodore paused and gazed upon that dark and gloomy wood, uncertain by what path he should direct his steps, and without remarking the keen and eager eyes with which the two barbarian ferrymen examined him from head to foot.

At length, as he still stood scanning the forest, one of them asked some question of the Arab Cremera; but it was couched in the language of the Alani, and Cremera could neither comprehend nor answer. The barbarian then advanced to the side of the young Roman's horse, and said, in a mild and sympathising voice, 'Are you not he who was expected?'

'I am not,' replied Theodore, in the same language. 'I am a Roman; but I seek to go to Margus by the barbarian bank of the river.'

'You will find it both difficult and dangerous,' answered the other, 'even if you already know this land; and if you do not know it, the lizard which climbs the rocks and trees, and glides through the smallest space upon its onward way, might as well try to travel upon the water. Besides, you know not whether you are welcome in the land.'

'My mother was daughter of Evaric, king of the Alani of Gaul,' replied Theodore; 'and wherever the land is tenanted by that nation I shall be welcome.'

The man kissed the edge of his mantle, saying, 'Be you welcome!' and Theodore continued: 'Can you give me no one to guide me on my way?'

'I will see, I will see!' replied the other; and he ran swiftly up into the wood.

Ere he had been long absent he reappeared, followed by a young man, clad in coarse clothing and common fur, who expressed himself willing, for a small reward, to undertake the task of guiding the stranger on his way; and though by his stature and complexion, very different from those of the tall and fair Alani, Theodore discovered at once that he was of some other tribe, and found, also, that he could only speak a few brief sentences of their language, the young Roman was, nevertheless, glad to put himself under the guidance of any one who knew the country well. With the few words that he could command of the language which Theodore had been speaking, the guide told him that it would be a journey of two days from that spot to Margus, and that houses where they could find refreshment and repose would be few; but still Theodore determined to pursue his way, and the guide was at once promised the hire that he demanded.

He made the young Roman stay while he caught and mounted a small shaggy horse which had been straying in the wood, round a hut which was just to be distinguished upon the upland, through the bolls of the tall trees. No sooner had he sprung upon his beast, however, than the whole nature of the barbarian seemed changed. Where he had been slow and limping in his gait, he became quick and active; and setting off at full speed though the forest, he pursued paths along which it was scarcely possible for Theodore and his companions to follow him; so narrow were they, so tangled, so insecure for any

horse unaccustomed to those intricate wilds.

Still poured down the rain; and as they galloped on through those dim vistas and sudden breaks, the white mist rolled in volumes amongst the trees, and each footfall of the horses produced a cloud from the marshy grass. At length, towards the evening, the sun, some three hours past his meridian, began to break through the heavy clouds, and streamed down the glades of the forest, while the light vapours rolled away, and the birds sang sweetly from the woody coverts around. In another hour three small tents of skins were seen; and pausing there for a short space, the guide procured some food for the horses and milk for the riders. The people of the tents looked wild and fierce, and spoke the dialect of the Huns, which was unintelligible to all ears but that of the guide. They showed no curiosity in regard to the stranger's appearance, but they evinced that avidity which is the peculiar vice of frontier tribes.

At the end of less than an hour the guide pointed to the sun and to the horses; and Theodore mounting, once more followed him on his way. Night fell ere they again saw a human abode; but at length they halted before a tall tower of hewn stone, which had in former years been a Roman fort, built as a defence against the very barbarians who now possessed the land. The guide tried the gateway; but finding it fast, shouted loudly for admission. He then paused to listen if any reply were made; and while he did so, Theodore heard afar the melancholy roaring of the Danube.

At length some grim faces and wild fur-clad forms presented themselves at the gate, and Theodore and his followers were led into what had been the chamber of the guard. There was no want of hospitality—nay, nor of courtesy of heart—shown by the rude tenants of that half-ruined building, to the young stranger who sought the shelter of the roof that had become theirs. They lighted a fire in the midst of the hall to dry his still damp garments; they brought forth their stock of fruit and milk, and even some of the delicacies obtained from the neighbouring country. Broiled fish was speedily added; and while the men, by speaking gestures, pressed him to his food, the women touched his mantle, and seemed by their smiles to marvel at its fineness.

Though their appearance was rude, and no comeliness of form or feature won by external beauty that confidence which is so often refused to homely truth, yet Theodore read in their looks that he was secure, and lay himself down upon a bed of skins to seek that repose which he so much needed. The freedmen lay at his feet; and all was soon silence within those crumbling walls: but sleep, the bosom friend of youth and happiness, grows timorous as a scared bird after the first fell grasp of grief. All that he had gone through within the last sad month, all that weighed upon his mind even then, came back in the visions of the night, and three times roused the young Roman from his light and troubled slumbers. The first time all was still, and the light of the blazing fire of pine flickered over the dark forms that lay sleeping around. The next time when he woke two figures were standing between him and the light, but one soon turned away and left the chamber, while the other, who remained, cast some fagots on the embers, and again lay himself down to rest. The slumber that succeeded was deeper, heavier, more tranquil; and when he again awoke, daylight was streaming in from above. Almost all the Huns whom he had seen the night before had left the chamber, and one, whom he had not hitherto beheld, stood with his arms folded on his chest, gazing upon him as he lay stretched in the morning light.

Between Theodore and the barbarian, however, awakened, watchful, and prepared, with his spear grasped in his hand, sat the faithful Cremera, his giant limbs and swelling muscles all ready to start into defence of his master on the slightest appearance of danger; but the eyes of the Hun seemed not even to see the slave, so intently were those small but searching orbs turned upon the countenance of the young Roman. Even when he woke, and looked up, the Hun withdrew not that stedfast gaze; but seemed to contemplate, with eager curiosity, the same features, which he had beheld silent and cold in sleep, now wakening up into warm and speaking life.

Theodore returned the glance for a moment, without rising, and, as he lay, scanned the person of the Hun. He was shorter than the ordinary height of the Romans; but his breadth across the shoulders was gigantic, with thin flanks and long muscular arms. His features were by no means handsome, and his complexion was a pale dark brown; but yet there was something in that countenance remarkable, striking, not displeasing. The small black eyes had an inexpressible brilliancy; the forehead, surmounted with thin grey hair, was broad, high and majestic; and the firm immovable bend of the almost beardless lips spoke that decision and strength of character which, when displayed either in good or evil, commands a separate portion of respect. His dress was nearly the same as that of the other barbarians whom Theodore had already encountered, consisting of dark grey cloth and skins; but the cloth was somewhat finer in texture, and the skins had a smooth and glossy softness, which showed the young Roman that the man who stood

before him was superior to the rest of those by whom he was surrounded. Nor had it, indeed, required the slight superiority of his garb to teach Theodore that he beheld no ordinary man. It has been asserted, and it may be so, that from some hidden source of sympathy, some instinctive prescience, we always feel peculiar sensations on first meeting with one who is destined greatly to influence or control our fate through life; and whether such be the case or not, certain it is that through the breast of Theodore, the moment his eyes rested on the Hun, passed a thrill not of fear nor of awe nor even of surprise, but of strange and mingled emotions, such as he had never known before; and, as I have said, he continued in the same recumbent attitude, gazing firmly in the face of one who gazed so stedfastly at him.

After a short pause, however, the Hun spoke, addressing him in the tongue of the Alani. 'Though that bed,' he said, in a low, deep-toned voice, every word of which was as distinct and clear as if spoken by a Stentor—'though that bed must be but a hard one for the soft limbs of a Roman, thou seemest too fond of it for such a youth as thou art.'

'Thou art mistaken, barbarian,' replied Theodore, springing on his feet; 'the Romans, who can lie on silken couches when they find them, do not think the ground either too cold or too hard when necessary to use it for their bed. I was weary with long journeying for many days; otherwise the crowing cock is my awakener.'

'Thou speakest the Alan tongue well,' said the Hun, gazing at him from head to foot; 'and thou art in colour and in size like a northman. Say, art thou really a Roman?'

'I am,' replied Theodore; 'but my mother was the daughter of Evaric——'

'King of the Alani,' interrupted the Hun; 'then thy father was Paulinus, count of the offices. We have met,' he added, musing, 'we have met; he is a valiant man: where is he now?'

'In the grave,' replied Theodore.

The Hun started; and after a moment's pause replied, 'I grieve for him; he was a valiant man: how did he die?'

'It matters not,' answered Theodore; 'he is dead. And now, barbarian, I would fain speed on my way, for I would be at Margus as early as may be. Where is my guide?'

'To Margus!' said the Hun: 'know you that the priest of that city—the bishop as they call him—has offended Attila the king? know you that Attila has demanded him from Theodosius as a slave, to set his foot upon his neck, and trample on him?'

'I have heard such rumours as I came hither,' replied Theodore; 'but it matters not to me what quarrel there may be between my uncle and the barbarian chief. Attila will find it hard to trample on the brother of Paulinus.'

'Ay! So he is Paulinus' brother!' cried the Hun; 'I do remember now he *is* his brother: but if thou bearest tidings from Theodosius to thine uncle, tell him to put no faith in the arms of men who know not how to use them; to trust not in those who daily break their promises. Tell him that he who bade you thus speak knows full well Attila the king; and that he will as soon abandon his prey as the hungry vulture. Your guide is gone; but follow me; I will show you the way to Margus.'

A number of barbarians were collected in the lower part of the tower, and in the open space round it, but without a word they suffered Theodore and his freedmen, with their new guide, to proceed to a tree under which four hourses stood prepared. All passed in silence; no one stood forward to assist; no one advanced to require recompense from the young stranger. The Hun who accompanied him sprang on his own horse at one bound, and then sat as if of a piece with the animal; while Theodore drew forth a coin of gold, and beckoned forward the barbarian who had acted the foremost part, on the preceding night, in offering him the rites of hospitality. The man looked wistfully at the gold piece which Theodore held out towards him, and then at the face of his superior, who sat beside the young Roman. The horseman, however, bowed his head, and the other instantly took the money, uttering a number of words which Theodore did not understand, but construed into thanks. Turning their bridles then towards the Danube, the journey towards Margus was recommenced, the Hun leading the way at a slow pace.

'You ride not so swiftly as our guide of yesterday,' said Theordore, after proceeding for a few minutes with the impatience of youth and anxiety urging him on; 'remember, I would be at Margus ere nightfall.'

''Tis a three hours' journey,' said the other, calmly: 'you are impatient, youth. I would fain spare the beast thou ridest; for, were it as the gods willed it to be, it would be a noble creature, and thou hast ridden it too long and too hard yesterday for a creature so sleek and pampered.'

'Despise it not, Hun!' said Theodore, as he saw the keen bright eye of his companion running over the charger's limbs; 'despise it not. It has carried my father through a bloody field of battle, and has borne me through a long and painful journey, after which it may well show some signs of weariness; therefore despise it not, though it be unlike the rugged brute which thou ridest thyself.'

'I do not despise it,' rejoined the Hun. 'In former times its soft and silken coat, its delicate limbs, and weighty body, might have provoked my scorn; but I have learned to know that all things have their uses, and to despise nothing but vicious luxury, effeminacy, and cowardice. I see no reason why there should not be tribes who fight and tribes who cultivate the land: each may be useful; and so with your horse and mine. Mine will carry me with a swiftness, and to a distance, and for a length of time, impossible to yours; will bear weather, and food, and cold, under which yours would die; but very likely in the shock of battle yours would bear down mine—if I did not prevent it—and, perhaps, might perform feats that mine could never learn. It is only when I see man debase himself to carve images, and paint pictures, and work gold, and spend years in making a dwelling to cover his miserable head, and lie upon the feathers of birds, and cover himself with the woven excrements of a worm, that I now feel disgust. Gems and jewels, and cups of gold and silver, may be wrought by other nations, and may be used by us; but it is the part of bold and brave men to take them from those who are weak and effeminate enough to make them.'

'I cannot argue with you, barbarian,' replied Theodore; 'my mind wanders unto other things; but I have heard my father say that all the graces and elegances of social life are the true touchstone of the noble heart. Those who are inclined by nature to evil will become effeminate and corrupt under their influence; while those who are brave and virtuous only gain thence a higher point of virtue, and a nobler motive for daring. The diamond, when we throw it into the fire, loses nothing but the dirt and dust it may have gathered, and comes out clearer than before. A barbarian fights because he has nothing to lose but life, which has many miseries, and few enjoyments; a Roman, because he has a duty to perform, although a thousand ties of refined pleasures and multiplied enjoyments bind him to the life he risks.'

'Therefore is it that the Romans fight so feebly,' replied the Hun; but as he saw the colour mounting in the cheek of Theodore, he added, 'Be not angry, youth; my words shall not offend your ear in a land which thou hast sought, trusting to our hospitality. Thy father might well speak as thou sayest he did, for he was one of those that showed his own words true.'

'Thou doest my father justice, my country wrong,' replied Theodore; 'but the day may come, Hun—the day may come, when Romans, rousing themselves from the sleep into which they have fallen, may teach those who now mistake idleness for cowardice, who take the love of repose and peace for timidity, that the lion yet lives, though his roar has not been heard for years.'

A grim smile hung for a moment on the lip of the barbarian, and then passed away; but he replied nothing directly to the tart answer of his young companion. At length, as they rode along by the rushing Danube, winding their way once more between the forests and the river, he pointed first to the one and then to the other bank, saying, 'Lo, Roman civilisation—Scythian rudeness! and yet, as thou sayest, the time may come—nay, it may be near, when the trial will take place, of which country produces, which habits nourish, the boldest hearts and strongest hands. But setting that apart, I say, give me the forest and the wild meadow, and the simple hut or tent of skins, truth, justice, freedom: for it is my belief that simplicity and honesty are one; luxury and falsehood are not to be divided.—Look at this forest,' he continued after a brief pause; 'it seems almost impervious, yet thou hast found a way through it; and at the foot of the hill which we are now mounting you will find a paved road, leading into the heart of the land. It was constructed by thy ancestors, nearly in a line with the famous Vallum Romanum; and if at any time need or fancy should make thee wish to see the nations which live beyond this woody barrier, follow that road, and ask for Onegisus, the friend of Attila the king. Thou shalt find safety, friends, and protection. But see! we are at the top of the hill, and I must leave thee. Yonder, on the other side of the stream, where the blue mist is rolling up the mountains, lies Margus. Lo! its many towers! Thou canst not miss the way. Now Mars protect thee!'

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE BISHOP OF MARGUS.

THE two sides of that mountain were like the prospect laid out beneath the eyes of man, when, in the midst of life, he pauses to survey the past, and scrutinise the future. Dark and gloomy, on the one hand, stretched masses, impervious to the eye, wrapped in uncertain mists and vague undefined confusion, where nothing was known, nothing was sure, but that there lay ruin, chill neglect, and desolation, even unto those regions where the Cimmerian darkness of the grave covered and confounded all. On the other hand, stretching

out like the sweet memories that lie along the path of youth, was seen a fair and beautiful land, with the Danube rushing on through the midst, towards Margus : valley and hill, fragments of the Dacian forests, but broken by broad cultivated plains, a watch-tower here and there ; then, within their guardian line, a farm, a villa, gardens, and pasturages, with the towers and walls of Margus at about eight miles' distance ; and beyond, but to the right, the Mons Aureus rising like a pile of lapis lazuli, in blue majestic splendour to the sky.

Theodore paused to gaze ; and feelings mingled, intense, and even painful, woke in his bosom at the sight of those fair scenes from which he might so soon be driven, contrasted with that dark and gloomy land which might prove his only refuge.

He turned, however, after a moment's silence, to ask the Hun if he could, in truth, prefer the one to the other : but the barbarian had left him without further leave-taking, and his dark form was seen riding rapidly towards the thickest part of the forest. Theodore still remained gazing over the prospect ; but, as he did so, he thought he heard a distant shout of many voices rising up from the woods behind him, and fearful of any interruption in his course, he hurried on upon the road which lay open before him.

Increasing tokens of civilisation now met his eye at every step as he proceeded ; and shortly before he reached the shore, at the nearest point to the city, he beheld more than one ferry-boat, no longer a mere raft, supported by inflated skins, but barks, provided expressly for the purpose, and offering every convenience at which the mature art of the Romans had yet arrived. Without question, the young Roman and his followers were admitted into one of the boats, and in a few minutes were landed on the other side of the Danube in the midst of all that hurry, bustle, and luxurious activity which marked the precincts of a Roman city, even in a remote province, and in the immediate vicinity of those barbarian allies who were soon destined to overwhelm all those soft and splendid scenes in blood and ashes.

The Roman dress and air of Theodore and his two freedmen, enabled them to pass on unquestioned through the gates, where a few soldiers, with their spears cast idly down, their helmets laid aside, and their swords unbraced, sat gaming in the sun, offering a sad but striking picture of the decay of that discipline which had once so speedily won, and had so long preserved, the dominion of the world. Gaily and tunefully carolled the flower-girl, as she tripped along with her basket full of wreaths and garlands for the festal hall or the flowing wine cup ; loudly shouted, with the ready cyathus in his hand, the seller of hot wine in the Thermopolium ; eagerly argued the lawyer and the suitor as they hurried along to the tribunal of the duumvir ; gaily laughed the boys, as, followed by a slave bearing their books, they hastened homeward from the school. Splendid dresses, fair faces, magnificent shops, and chariots with tires of gold and silver, litters with cushions stuffed with the flowers of the new blown rose, met the eye of Theodore in every direction ; and as he looked on all this luxury and magnificence, and compared it with the scenes he had just quitted, he could not help asking himself, 'And is this Margus? Is this the city daily threatened by barbarian enemies? Is this the extreme point of civilisation, upon the very verge of woods and wilds, and hordes of savage Scythians?'

At the end of a wide open space, towards the centre of the town, rose one of those beautiful peristyles—less light, but perhaps more imposing, than the Greek—whereof so many had been constructed under Hadrian. Within it appeared a massy temple, formerly dedicated to Jupiter, but now consecrated to that purer faith destined to remain unsullied through everlasting ages, notwithstanding the faults, the follies, and the vices of some of its ministers.

At the moment that the young Roman entered the forum, the mingled crowd of worshippers was descending the steps of the temple ; and above them, between the two central pillars of the portico, clothed in his sacerdotal robes, and with his extended hands giving his blessing to the people, stood a tall and princely form, in which Theodore instantly recognised the Bishop of Margus, the brother of his father.

Dismounting from his horse, the young Roman waited for a moment, until the crowd had in some degree dispersed, and then, ascending the steps towards the door through which his uncle had retired into the church, he asked a presbyter, who was still lingering on the threshold, if he could speak with the bishop.

'You will find him at his dwelling, my son,' replied the presbyter ; 'he has passed through the church, and has gone to his mansion, which lies just behind it.'

Theodore took the direction in which the presbyter pointed with his hand ; and, followed by Cremera and the other freedmen, reached the entrance of a splendid dwelling, round the doors of which stood a crowd of poor clients, waiting for the daily dole of bread and wine. Theodore found some difficulty, however, in obtaining admission to his uncle's presence. 'He is gone to divest himself of his sacred robes,' one slave replied ; 'he is busy in private devotion,'

asserted another; a third plainly refused to admit the stranger unless previously informed of his name and purpose.

'Tell the bishop,' said Theodore, 'that it is a Roman from Constantinople, who brings him tidings of his friends, which it much imports him to hear as soon as may be.'

There was the accent of command in the young Roman's speech, which made the slave hasten to obey; and in a moment after the curtain, beneath which he had passed in order to communicate the message to the bishop, was drawn back, and Theodore found himself in the presence of his uncle.

The prelate gazed upon him for a moment in silence. It is probable that at first he did not recognise the boy, whom he had not seen for several years, in the young man that now stood before him; and yet that faint and twilight recollection—more like the act of perception than of remembrance—by which old impressions first break upon us, before memory has time distinctly to trace out the particulars, caused the shades of manifold emotions to pass over his countenance, as his eyes remained fixed on the face of his nephew.

'Theodore!' he exclaimed at length, 'Theodore! what in the name of heaven has brought you here at this hour, and under these circumstances? Know you not that the barbarians demand my life to expiate the sins of others? Know you not that they threaten to seek me even here, and sate their vengeance in the blood of my flock, if I be not given up to them? Know you not that the weak emperor, after having faintly refused their horrible demand, now hesitates whether he should yield his innocent subject, and the teacher of his people, to the barbarous hands of his enemies? What was your father thinking of to send you here? unless, indeed, he be bringing six legions to my aid, and you be but the harbinger of the coming succour.'

'Alas, my uncle!' replied Theodore mournfully, 'no such tidings have I to tell; nevertheless, my tidings are not few, nor of little import; but let us speak of them alone. Here there are many ears around us; and you may perchance find it expedient to consider well what I have to say ere you make it public.'

As he spoke, he glanced his eye towards the crowd of slaves and officers who filled the other end of the hall in which they stood; and the bishop, who had been moved to indiscretion by the sudden appearance of his nephew, resumed the caution which, though a bold, ambitious man, formed part of his natural character, and, making a sign with his hand, said merely, 'Follow me.' As he spoke, he led the way through the great hall to a small room beyond, from which a flight of steps descended to a beautiful garden, laid out in slopes, and adorned with many a statue and many a fountain. The curtain, drawn back between it and the hall, exposed to the view any one who approached on that side, while on the other the terraces lay open to the eye, so that nought with a step less stealthy than that of Time himself could approach unperceived.

'Here, my nephew, here,' said the bishop, 'our secret words will not pass beyond our own bosoms. Tell me what brings you hither at a moment of such earnest difficulty—at a moment when I know not whether the base emperor may not deliver me up to the barbarian Attila. I who have abandoned all—state, dignity, the paths of ambition and of glory—to devote myself to the service of God and his holy church. Yet tell me, first, how fares your father, how fares my noble brother? Why wrote he not in answer to my letter beseeching him to use his power with Theodosius in my behalf?'

'I come,' replied Theodore—who, judging that the bishop's questions regarding Paulinus were but formal words of no very deep meaning, proceeded at once to the point on which his uncle's curiosity was really excited,—'I come, my uncle, to seek refuge and shelter with you, against the anger of a base weak monarch. Three days' journey behind me is your cousin, Julia Flavia, with her children and my sister. Persecuted by Theodosius for no fault committed, we thought that if we could find shelter in the world it would be with my uncle at Margus.'

'Safety at Margus!' cried the prelate, in truth affected by the earnest and pleading tone in which his nephew spoke—'safety at Margus! Oh, Theodore, Theodore! Is there safety to be found on board a sinking ship? Is there safety to be found between the opposing spears of two hostile armies met in battle? You come to me at a time when I know not whether the next moment may continue to afford security to myself. You come to me at a moment when my soul is trembling—though not with fear;—no, but wavering with uncertain purposes, like a loosened sail quivering in the blast of the tempest, uncertain to which side it may be driven, or whether it may not be torn in fragments from the mast. You come to me in such a moment as this for refuge? But could not your father protect you—my great, my warlike, my courtly, my all-powerful brother, who despised the poor-spirited priest, and thought the robe and stole the refuge of a low ambition? O Paulinus, Paulinus! how I could have loved you!—Yet what do I say, Theodore? your dark robe! your untrimmed hair! your jewelless garments!—Tell me, boy, tell me, where is your father?'

'Alas, replied Theodore, 'I have no father. He who was my father is dead, murdered by the emperor!'

The living lightnings of fierce indignation flashed from the priest's proud eyes; and after pausing for a moment, as if unable to give voice to the feelings that struggled in his breast for utterance, he shook his hand towards the sky, to which his eyes were also raised, exclaiming, 'Tyrant, thou hast sealed thy fate!' then, casting himself down upon a couch, he drew his robe over his head, and Theodore could hear him weep. The youth was moved; and at length he took his uncle's hand in his, and pressed his lips upon it, saying, 'I knew not that you loved him thus.'

'Yes, Theodore, yes!' replied the bishop; 'I did love him, better than he knew, better than I knew myself till this very hour. We had different tempers, we chose opposite paths, we held opposite opinions. That which I thought wisdom, he would misname craft; that which I held as just, he would taunt as base. We were both, perhaps, ambitious, but in different ways; and his ambition led him to contemn mine; and yet, Theodore, and yet I loved him better than any other human being. When I strove for eminence in the state which I had chosen, when I raised my voice and made the proud to bow, the sinner to tremble, piety to kindle into enthusiasm, and devotion to reach its highest pitch, my first imagination was what Paulinus would think; my first hope to tower above his low opinion. He was the object and the end of many of my best and greatest actions: almost every thought of my life has had some reference to him. I have disputed, opposed, quarrelled with him — nay, even hated him, and yet belied my own heart, by loving him still!'

The bishop paused, and, crossing his arms upon his broad chest, fixed his eyes upon the sky, and remained for several minutes in gloomy silence, as if summoning up before the eye of memory all the visions of the past. 'Theodore,' he continued at length, speaking in a rambling, musing tone, 'Theodore, I will be to you as a father. What my fate may be, I know not; but my brother's murderer shall never deliver me up to the power of the barbarians. Do you mark me? He shall learn that, deprived of the just defence of my sovereign, I can defend myself. But it matters not! You are too young for such counsels! Paulinus, my brother, thou art dead; but thou shalt be avenged. The cup of wrath wanted but one drop to make it overflow, and thy murder has poured an ocean into it. Now tell me, Theodore—the Lady Flavia, where is she? She shall be welcome to Margus. Within these walls my power is unlimited. The people and their magistrates are equally my flock and my servants; so that I can assure a welcome to those who seek it. Where is Flavia? Why came she not with you?'

'Because tidings reached us every day,' replied Theodore, 'of messengers sent from Constantinople, bearing orders for our arrest —perhaps for our death. Three of these messengers, we learned, had taken the way to Margus; and ere we could venture to trust ourselves here, I came on to see whether the power of my uncle could give us shelter and security.'

A smile of bitter meaning gleamed over the countenance of the bishop. 'Three messengers!' he said—'three messengers, bearing orders for your arrest or death! No later than yesterday morning, three Byzantines—for so part of their dress bespoke them—were found, slain by the Huns, as it appeared, near Tricornium, higher up the river. Perchance these have been the messengers, and have delivered their just and clement letters to the wrong hands.'

'It is not unlikely,' replied Theodore. 'They must have been near that town early in the morning of yesterday; but I had news of their course, and crossed the Danube, lest, with fresh horses, and perhaps a guard from that station, they might overtake and seize me.'

'They have been seized themselves,' said the prelate, setting his teeth close. 'The smiter has been smitten; the messenger of death has found death himself. But how escaped you the Huns yourself, bold youth? For the last month they have made excursions across the river, destroying wherever they came. How was it that you, who without permission entered their own land, passed through them in perfect safety?'

'In truth I know not,' replied Theodore, 'unless it was that I began by speaking to the ferrymen in the Alan tongue.'

'That has saved you,' replied the prelate; 'but now, my son, we must not lose time. These are days of danger, when the very air is full of winged death. We must not leave the Lady Flavia and her children one moment longer unprotected than is needful. Tell me with what company she travels. Ye were not, I trust, obliged to fly in such haste as to leave all your domestics behind.'

'Oh no!' replied Theodore; 'the tribune Marcian, who brought us the sad tidings of my father's fate, and warned us of our own danger, took care that all the slaves should accompany us; and saw that all the gold and jewels, either belonging to Flavia, or which my father had left in Illyria, should be borne with us, to escape the greedy hands of Theodosius. Thank God, we have enough to support us with dignity till this storm be blown away, and the sun shines once more.'

'Alas, Theodore!' replied the priest, 'seldom is it with man that the sun, once clouded, ever shines again. The bosom of nature, torn by the tempest, soon recovers its gaiety and its beauty, or, swept by the shower, wakes up again in brighter loveliness; but the heart of man, beaten by the storms of fate, never regains its freshness, but is dulled and withered by every drop that falls, and revives not again till his short day is closed. But I will send out to greet Flavia and bid her welcome. Glad am I that she brings with her wealth and attendants. Not that I could not myself have supplied her with all she might need; for, thanks be to Him who gave, my worldly wealth is great—greater than is perhaps good for securing the treasure in heaven. Nevertheless, all our wealth may not be more than sufficient for the purpose that I have in view. I will send out to find her, and bring her hither.'

'Nay, my uncle,' replied Theodore, 'I will myself be the messenger. She will not give herself to the guidance of any one, if I do not return. I am not weary; and an hour or two of rest would enable me, had I but fresh horses for myself and the freedmen, to seek her at once. This bank of the river, by the death of these messengers, is now free, and the way is shorter.'

His uncle made some opposition on the plea of his nephew's youth, and yet unconfirmed strength. but that opposition was slight, and soon overcome. There was, indeed, an eagerness, a haste, an impetuosity, in the bishop's whole demeanour, which betokened a keen and ambitious mind struggling with difficulties and dangers, which he feared not, but estimated at their true value. He seemed, to the eyes of Theodore, like a skilful swordsman contending with a multitude of enemies, with all his energies awake and active to avoid every blow, to parry every thrust, and to return upon his assailants their strokes with usury.

When at length he consented that his nephew should go, and gave him into the hands of one of his officers, with directions to provide for his repose and refreshment, what was the impression which his uncle's conduct had made upon Theodore's mind? The bishop had been kinder than he expected; he had evinced more affection for his father, more deep love for that dead parent whose memory was enshrined in the heart of Theodore, and revered as the relics of some pure and sainted martyr; he had shown more depth of feeling, and more of the energy of talent, than the youth had been taught to believe he could display; and yet Theodore was not satisfied. The diamond touchstone of a pure and innocent heart, without an analysis, without minute investigation, detected at once the alloy which ran through the seeming gold: he saw that there was much of goodness, he saw that there was much of power, in his uncle's character; but there wanted the simplicity, the mildness, the humility of the Christian priest: there were strong feelings without strong principles, high talents without high honour, and through all his best and brightest qualities ran a vein of brilliant selfishness, simulating nearly, in appearance, the more precious things with which it mixed; but oh! how different in intrinsic value.

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## CHAPTER X.

### THE TREASON.

IT was night; but no bright moon compensated for the absence of the greater orb, and the air was dark, though the sky itself shone with all its innumerable sparks of golden light. It was one of those nights in which the depth of the heavens becomes apparent, in which each separate star is seen hanging distinct and apart from all the rest, a lamp of everlasting fire in the blue profound of space. The lately troubled waters of the Danube had become clear: and flowing more calmly, though in a less volume, mirrored the splendid pageantry of heaven's resplendent host.

Within an hour, however, after the full setting of the sun had left the earth to the dominion of the night, another light than that of the stars was reflected from the waters of the rolling stream at the distance of a few miles from the city of Margus. The glare of a multitude of torches flickered over the rolling stream, and cast a red unpleasing light over the rocks and trees amidst which the Roman road was cut from Tricornium to Margus. That light, too, shone upon the anxious and wearied countenances of those who, a little more than a month before, we have seen, set out from the spot where all their happy memories were left behind them, to wander forward towards lands and fortunes that they knew not.

A change, however, had been effected in the appearance of many of that party. Young as he was, Theodore had shown a wisdom and prudence beyond his years; and as soon as they had lost the escort of the tribune Marcian, on the frontiers of Mœsia, he had selected twenty of the most faithful slaves, and had besought Flavia to liberate and arm them. His pretext was that, in approaching

the barbarian countries, many dangers lay upon the way; but he did not say that even against the authority of the emperor himself those arms might not be used.

Belated by the length and fatiguing nature of the way, many a timid glance was cast by Ildica and Eudochia towards the opposite bank of the stream, where lay shrouded in its dark woods the strange and dangerous country of the Huns. Many an apprehensive inquiry, too, went from lip to lip amongst the women slaves that followed; and, though each knew that the other was as ignorant of the land through which they were passing as herself, many a time was the question asked, 'How far is it now to Margus?' meeting still with the same unsatisfactory reply. At length Theodore, riding up from the rear of the line, where he had remained to see that no one lingered behind, approached the side of the lectula in which Ildica was borne, and said, to the no small joy of all who heard him, 'Lo! the arch of Trajan. To Margus is but one short mile.'

That mile was soon accomplished; and at the gates of the city they were met by persons sent on purpose to welcome them, both by the magistrates and by the bishop of the town. Such friendly greeting in such a remote spot, the sight of a populous and wealthy city, the cheerful sounds and objects which met the ear and eye in the streets, served to revive hope in the bosoms of that weary and anxious train, and to recall the images of warm domestic tranquillity, which had been banished during their dreary journey of the last two days: a house had been prepared for them, not far from the dwelling of the bishop, and they found, waiting their arrival, all those ready luxuries which the skill and ingenuity of the most pleasure-loving nation upon earth had devised in the most voluptuous period of the world's history. Baths were prepared; wine-cups crowned with garlands, and delicacies from remote lands, waited for the lip; the softest triclinia surrounded the already spread table; and the sound of sweet music was breathing through the atrium: odours floated on the air; lights blazed through the halls; and when at length Flavia, Ildica, Eudochia, Theodore, and Ammian stood in the midst of that enchanted scene—far from their enemies, with a place of certain refuge close at hand, and the long, weary, perilous journey accomplished behind them—feelings of joy and thankfulness, great, irrepressible, overpowering, welled up from the deep fountain of the heart, and, casting themselves into each other's arms, they wept.

Many moments passed in those entrancing feelings; but when at length the bishop appeared to bid them welcome to a city over which his eloquence and powers of mind had given him greater influence than even the representative of the imperial authority possessed, Flavia had again resumed her calm and tranquil dignity. He would not sit down to meat with the guests, for whose entertainment he had provided so sumptuously, affecting an abstinence which might or might not be habitual; but he insisted upon waiting in a neighbouring chamber while they supped, declaring that he had matter of some moment to communicate to the Lady Flavia. Simple in her habits, and encouraging simplicity in her children, Flavia was soon prepared to give the prelate that private hearing which he desired. He led her accordingly into another chamber, while Ammian sported with Eudochia; and Theodore, seated beside Ildica, tasted once more the sweet moments of love.

They were the only ones that they had known since the fatal night of the earthquake, since that night which had witnessed the first union of their hearts in the bond of spoken affection. In all their other meetings—in every other communication which they had yet had—danger and terror, like the drawn sword in the eastern feast, had hung above their heads, and marred the tranquillity of their mutual hearts. Now, however, when apprehension was drowned in hope, they felt—and oh, how dear was the feeling!—that the love, which had grown up in joy and peace, had been increased and strengthened, brightened and perfected, by dangers and misfortunes.

Theodore held Ildica's graceful hand in his, and gazed into those dark, dark lustrous eyes, reading therein a reply to all the intense and passionate love of his own ardent heart; and Ildica, seated on the couch beside him, lifted the long sweet curtains of those gem-like orbs to the countenance of her lover, and, with the mingled glance of timidity and confidence, seemed to pour forth the thanks of her fervent spirit, not only for all that he had done to soothe, to comfort, and to protect her, but for all the unspoken thoughts of love, the anxieties and fears concealed, the constant remembrance by day, the frequent dreams by night—for all, in short, which her heart told her that his had felt in the hours of pain and care through which they had so lately passed. Low and murmured words read a comment on those looks, and Theodore and Ildica once more knew an hour of intense delight.

A large chamber intervened between that in which they sat and that to which her mother had retired to hold conference with the prelate, and the veils over both the doorways were drawn. For some time the voice of neither speaker was heard, but at length the tones grew higher. The low sweet murmur even of Flavia's tongue found its way to the hall where her children waited her return,

and the high but harmonious tones of the eloquent priest sounded loud and sustained, as if he were using all his powers of oratory upon some great and inspiring theme. No distinct words, however, were heard, and then again, after a time, the voices once more sank low, and in a few minutes the bishop and the lady issued forth with hasty steps and agitated looks. The prelate was passing rapidly on, without noticing his brother's children, as if carried forward by some strong excitement; but ere he reached the doorway, his habitual self-command returned in a degree, and, turning round with a knitted brow but an air of dignity, he raised both his extended hands, saying, 'Bless you, my children! the blessing of God be upon this house, and all that it contains.' That done, he again turned upon his way, and rapidly quitted the apartment.

In the meanwhile, in the midst of that rich hall stood Flavia, with her pale cheek flushed, her beautiful eyes wild and thoughtful, her fair hand pressed tight upon her broad statue-like brow, and her lips murmuring words which sounded vague and unmeaning, because the key to their sad interpretation was in her own bosom. At length she spoke: 'Hie thee to repose, Eudochia,' she said; 'hie thee to repose, my sweet child. Ammian, too, seek rest, my boy, while thou mayst find it. Ye have had a weary journey, children, and God only knows when it may be renewed.'

With some light and fanciful words from Ammian, breathing the spirit of bright untiring youth, some of the slaves were summoned, and the two younger members of that family, whose fate we have so long followed, retired to sleep. Flavia listened for their parting steps; but when all was quiet, she caught the hand of Theodore, exclaiming, 'Oh, my son, have you known and consented to this?'

'Have I known what, dear mother?' demanded Theodore, who had hitherto mastered his surprise. 'I have consented to nothing which should move my mother thus painfully.'

'I believed it, Theodore, I believed it,' replied Flavia. 'In your veins and in mine flows the blood of those Romans who thought life a light sacrifice for their country, whose gore flowed like water for the defence and preservation of their native land; and I am sure, that if you be your father's son no danger, no injustice, will induce you to forget your duty, and bring upon the country of your birth the tide of barbarian warfare! Is it not so, my son?'

'It is!' answered Theodore; 'but what mean you, my mother? We understand not to what your words apply.'

But Flavia continued, turning to her daughter: 'And you, Ildica,' she said, 'tell me that you are my child indeed—that you would sacrifice life, and all life's dearest interests, rather than take part or benefit by, or instigate the ruin of, your country.'

'I would, my mother, I would,' replied Ildica, while her person seemed to grow taller, and her resemblance to her mother increased under the excitement of the moment. 'I would sacrifice life, and, what is far dearer than life, I would sacrifice him,' and she laid her hand upon the arm of Theodore. 'I would rather see him die in defence of his country than live and prosper by its fall. Oh, my mother, you have judged your child rightly; the blood of my father, spilt by the enemies of our native land, throbs in his daughter's heart; and even this weak hand, were there none other to assert our country, might yet strike one blow in her defence.'

'My noble child,' cried Flavia, throwing her arms around her daughter, 'thou art worthy of thy race. Theodore, what think you that your uncle proposes to me to do? To throw wide the gates of Margus to the barbarians, to open the way for the Huns into the heart of the empire, to buy revenge for your father's death, and safety for ourselves, by the desolation of our native land, the destruction and ruin of our friends, and the massacre of our fellow-countrymen! Shame on such degenerate Romans! Shame, shame upon them to all eternity! Oh, God, oh, God! where are thy thunderbolts?'

Theodore stood, for a moment, as one stupefied by the strange and fearful tidings he had heard; and fixing his eyes upon Flavia's face, he gazed upon her with an expression of inquiring doubt, which showed how far he was from any participation in the schemes or feelings of his uncle. 'My mother,' he said, at length, 'let us go hence. This is no refuge for us. Did he think by showing us here an image of that splendour and comfort which we so long possessed, and so lately lost—did he think to blind our eyes, and weaken our hearts, and destroy our virtue? My choice, oh, my mother, is made: give me honour and misery, if virtue cannot secure peace. Let us go hence.'

'At sunrise to-morrow,' replied Flavia, 'we will depart, for I much fear that he told me not all; I doubt that his dealing with the Huns is far advanced.'

'Why not at once, then?' demanded Theodore; 'to-morrow's daylight may be too late.'

Flavia turned her eyes upon her daughter, who understood the glance, and answered at once, 'My mother, I can go, though I am wearied: were it not better to drop by the wayside than risk our future peace?'

But Theodore interposed. 'No, no,' he said; 'an hour before daylight will be time enough. The slaves are wearied beyond all endurance; and perhaps, also, were we to

attempt it to-night, the guards might become suspicious, and stay us at the gates. To-morrow it will seem more natural. The wearied soldiers, at that hour, will let us pass without inquiry, and, following the course of the river, we can pass through Noricum, and take refuge either amongst my kindred of the Alani, or under the strong shield of Ætius, in Gaul, from whose protection, neither weak emperor dare attempt to snatch us. Rest thee, Ildica!' he added, throwing his arms around her—'rest thee, my beloved! and rest thee, too, dear mother! I will see all prepared, and ready to set out an hour before the dawning of the day.'

'And thou, my poor Theodore,' said Flavia, 'thou hast no rest!'

'Am I not a Roman?' was the youth's reply.

On the next morning, while the city of Margus was still buried in slumber, and all vacant were those streets so lately thronged with the gay unthinking crowd pursuing with light heart the butterfly Pleasure, and never dreaming that Fate, like a lion, was following fast upon its track—the same train which the night before had entered the gates with joy, now passed them again with sorrow, but without regret. Theodore had first presented himself, and had held a momentary conversation with a soldier on guard. The gates had then been opened by the janitor of the night, and the slaves, who led the train, passed out. Ildica and Eudochia followed; but as the litter of Flavia was borne forward, Theodore approached its side, and said, in a low voice, 'They demand that one of us at least should stay to give account of our departure either to the bishop or the magistrates; I will keep Cremera and some others with me. In the meantime go you on, and I will join you speedily.'

Flavia turned an anxious look upon him, but he added, in a still lower tone, 'Fear not; they dare not detain me;' and, motioning to the slaves who bore the litter to proceed, he drew back under the archway.

Their course lay to the westward; but as Theodore turned towards the city, a faint grey light hung over the massy towers and columns of Margus, showing that the dawn of day was fast approaching. With a slow pace, and a sad but resolute heart, Theodore returned to the house which had been assigned to them as their dwelling; and, after a momentary pause, turned his steps on foot to the mansion of the bishop. The gates were already open, some of the slaves at work, and the light of the now dawning day was seen streaming faint and cold through the long range of vestibules and halls, from an open archway, beyond which appeared various groups of statues, fountains, and pillars, ornamenting a courtyard. Like all dependants on the great and powerful, keen to perceive who were in favour, who were influential with their lords, the slaves, who, a few days before, had obstructed the access of Theodore to his uncle, hastened to pay their court to one whom they now knew, and besought him with officious civility to repose himself there, till the bishop should have risen to receive him.

The mind of Theodore, however, was not in a state to permit him to take even corporeal rest; and he replied that he would walk forth into the court, and amuse himself with the statues and fountains till his uncle was prepared to receive him. The cold and absent tone in which he spoke checked all intrusion; and, meditating on his wayward fate, he walked forth alone, now pausing as if to contemplate some beautiful piece of sculpture, now gazing, as if with pleased attention, on the clear waters that, welling from the rocky ground on which the city was built, sparkled round the court in innumerable graceful urns and vases; but with his mind, in fact, employed on matters far different from the light elegancies and calm pleasures of life.

Thus absent and musing, he went on to a spot where a long flight of steps led down to the bottom of that terraced garden which he had beheld from above in his first conference with his uncle. Scarcely conscious of what he did, Theodore slowly descended the steps, and entered one of the long paved walks at the very lowest part of the garden. The right side was flanked by a strong wall, in which were two or three doorways leading, as it would seem, to the pomærium, or open space between the town and its fortified walls—for the house itself was one of the farthest from the centre of Margus. Scarcely had he entered that path, however, when the sound of steps made him raise his eyes, and he beheld before him four dark figures—to see which, in that place, caused him suddenly to pause, and lay his hand upon his sword. Ere he could distinguish their faces, by the general aspect of their forms, he perceived that they were barbarians, free, and in a Roman city at that early hour. A moment more showed him that, while three of the party had mingled their barbarian dress of skins with jewels and ornaments of gold and silver, the fourth, who preceded the others as they advanced, retained the original simple habit of his nation, being clothed in plain but valuable furs and dark cloth, but of exceeding fineness. Those who followed bore about them many strange and barbarian arms, but he who preceded had nothing but a broad and heavy sword, composed solely of iron from its hilt to its scabbard. In him Theodore instantly recognised the Hun who had been his guide on his last day's journey through the Dacian territory.

and the same unaccountable feeling passed through his bosom which he had experienced on beholding him before. He saw too well, however, that Flavia's suspicions were correct, and that his uncle had already plunged irretrievably into those dangerous intrigues which were destined to prove not only the ruin of himself and of the city which yielded itself so tamely and entirely to his government, but far beyond that, to his whole native land; and indignation for a moment mastered all other sensations.

'What doest thou here, barbarian?' was his only greeting when they met.

'What is that to thee, youth?' rejoined the Hun, with a calm, haughty smile, such as may play upon a father's lip when he reproves—though amused thereby—the forwardness of some spoiled child. 'But speak thine own language,' he continued, in a corrupt dialect of the Latin tongue; 'speak thine own language: weak and insignificant as it is, it will cover from the ears of those who hear us such light words as those thou hast just spoken.'

'My words were not light, Hun,' replied Theodore; 'for every Roman may well demand what thou doest here, when he meets with armed barbarians in the heart of a Roman city.'

'We are armed,' said the Hun, 'but we are few. What I do here is nought to thee; but if thou wilt listen to me, my coming may do thee service. I love thee for thy mother's father, and for her brother. They were my friends; and he who would be terrible to those who hate him, must do good deeds to those who love him. Know that the Roman empire trembles to its fall. Attila, the king, has said it, and it will come to pass. He has said, "I will sweep it as a cloud sweeps the tops of the forest. I will pass over it as a storm," he has declared, "from one part even unto the other; and I will not leave it, so long as one Roman stands up before me to oppose me." Attila, the king, has said it, and his words shall be made true. Nevertheless, as thou art one of those who think that there is yet vigour in weakness, and strength in Rome, I bid thee consider what would be thy fate even should thine emperor be successful in resistance. The blood of thy father is upon his head; thou fleest from his vengeance, and he seeks thy life; thus much have I learnt from thee and from thine uncle. Should Attila be successful, and thou not of his friends, thou perishest. Should Theodosius triumph, thinkest thou that he who has trodden upon the mighty will spare the weak?'

'Hun!' said Theodore, taking a step forward to pass him, 'could my blood, poured forth on the banks of yonder river, like the dragon's teeth of Cadmus, raise up an host of armed men to defend my native land against thee and against thy king, I would hold my throat to the knife, and die with gratitude and joy! Thinkest thou that such a one can be impelled by fear, or led by hope, to serve thee and to betray his native land?'

'I think,' replied the Hun, 'that thou mightest be a faithful friend to a worthier monarch than thine own. Fare thee well! and remember, as I told thee when last we met: in future times, when the hands of Fate shall have shaken from their places thrones and empires, and have changed the fate of little as well as great, shouldest thou need protection, thou wilt find it in the name of Onegisus. Now, forward to thine uncle; I must hence.'

Without returning to the court, Theodore sprang up the terraces of the garden, towards the chamber where he had before conferred with the bishop. His hurried step caught the prelate's attention; and ere Theodore had reached the top his uncle's majestic form, clothed in his splendid robes, appeared in the doorway above, gazing down to see who it was that approached so rapidly.

'Theodore,' he exclaimed, while an expression of pleasure and expectation lighted up his features, 'I trust you are come to bear me good tidings, and that the Lady Flavia is not so rashly obstinate as when last I saw her.'

'Far from it!' said Theodore, gravely, 'I have come but to tell you that we remain Romans to our death. All who entered the gates last night, except myself and a few slaves, are by this time an hour's journey on their way to Noricum.'

'Rash woman! what has she done?' cried the bishop, clasping his hands; 'she is lost, she is lost! Fly, Theodore, quick! Fly like the lightning! Bring her back hither; or if she will not come, lead her on the road to the south, anywhere but the road she has taken.'

Theodore gazed upon the agitated countenance of his uncle in amazement; but the bishop continued, more vehemently than before, 'Fly! do I not tell you to fly? Lose not a moment! breathe not a word! Away, as if a lion were behind you. The Huns are already across the river, on the very road she has taken. If she will not return hither, seek for no highway, look for no easy path, but plunge at once into the country, and hurry to the southward, making not a moment's pause!'

Without a word of reply, the youth darted through the vacant rooms, passed the gates of the dwelling, the Basilica, and the Forum; reached the house where the horses and slaves remained, sprang upon his charger's back, and, followed by the rest, dashed out

towards the walls of the city. The gates were open, but, to his surprise, no soldiers, no gate-keepers, were now there. The guard had been withdrawn for purposes which he too well divined; and passing out unquestioned, he hurried on with the same frantic speed in search of those he loved.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE SEARCH.

HURRYING on without pause, and impressed with but the one overpowering thought of the danger of all he loved on earth, Theodore soon reached the banks of the Danube, and gazed onward upon the road which for several miles lay straight before him. But nothing met his sight, either to raise his hopes, or increase his apprehensions: all was open and clear, and not even a cart or a beast of burden from the country, no, not a single peasant bringing in his basket of fruit or flowers, arrested the eye, as it wandered down the long straight avenue. A pair of enormous eagles, whirling slowly round, high up in the blue morning sky, was the only sight of animated being that presented itself; the singing of a light bird, too lowly and insignificant to fear those majestic tyrants of the skies, and the dull roar of the great river, were the only sounds that broke upon the ear.

Hope sets her quick foot wherever fear leaves the space vacant; and Theodore trusted that Ildica might have passed on ere the Huns had crossed the river. He paused not, however, at the voice of the syren, but still urged on his horse, gazing anxiously forward, and listened for every sound. The five freedmen who had remained with him followed as fast as they could, but the superior power and swiftness of the young Roman's charger left a short but increasing interval between them. That interval was less, perhaps, than half a mile, when Theodore reached the wooded rocks, round whose immovable bases the road was forced to wind; but his faithful Cremera saw him disappear behind them with apprehension, and urged on his horse with eager haste, till he and the rest had also turned the angle of the rocks, and once more beheld their master.

Theodore was now at less than a hundred yards' distance: he had dismounted, and, with the charger standing beside him, was kneeling over some object which had attracted his attention on the road. When the freedmen came up, they too sprang to the ground, to look upon the sight which had stopped him. It was the body of one of their companions, who had been selected like themselves to bear arms upon the dangerous journey they had been forced to undertake. His spear was in his hand, with the iron red with blood, and in his heart was fixed a reed arrow, such as some of the Scythian nations used in their wars.

Theodore pointed in silence to the corpse, gazed for a moment round, and followed with his haggard eye the long track of the road, apparently to discover if any new object of horror lay before him; and then, after once more looking sternly upon the dead man, he shook his sword from the sheath, sprang again upon his horse, and galloped on his way. As he went, however, his eye searched anxiously on the ground for further traces regarding the too evident fate which had befallen Flavia and her company; nor was he without finding such marks: the ground was dented and beaten with horses' feet, and stains of blood here and there showed that there had been a contest of a fierce and desperate kind on the spot over which he passed.

Scarcely three hundred yards from the place where lay the body of the freedman, a small road turned off to the left, leading down through the woods with which that part of the country was thickly strewn, to the banks of the river Margus, higher up than the city. At that point, too, the traces—which had hitherto marked so plainly the course which those he sought for had pursued—no longer afforded him a clue, for, separating as it were into two distinct streams, the footmarks of the horses went on in either track, leading, on the one hand, towards Tricornium, and, on the other, into the thinly-peopled and half-cultivated country towards Illyria.

He paused in doubt; and the agony of impatience, even at a moment's delay, was only equalled by that of apprehension, lest he should mistake the path, as he turned from one to the other. However, the sun just rising above the trees that fringed the bank suddenly poured a stream of light upon the left-hand road, and the rays caught and glittered on some shining substance, which lay at about a bow-shot distance. Theodore darted forward, and his doubts were removed at once; for that which accidentally flashed back the sunshine to his eye was the collar of emeralds which he himself had borne to Ildica from his father Paulinus. He hesitated no longer, but hurried on; and ere he had proceeded more than a quarter of an hour, the sound of voices and the neigh of horses told him that his speed had brought him near to those he had pursued.

What was his purpose? he himself scarcely

knew : it was vague, undefined, uncertain : it might be to save, it might be to live or die with those whom he loved.

The spot where he then stood was a wooded covert, near the brow of a high hill which, sloping down on the other side beyond him, left the forest on its summit, and stretched into natural meadows, covering the bottom of a sweet and tranquil valley. He knew not, however, what was the scene beyond the brow ; but he heard voices and barbarian tongues, and was hurrying on to meet the fate in store for him, whatever that store might be, when the figure of a woman darted through the wood ; and Flavia, pale and sad as a statue on a tomb, stood by his horse's side, and threw her arms up to clasp him as he sat.

'My children ! my children !' she cried. 'Oh, Theodore ! my children are in the power of the Huns !'

'Where ?' demanded Theodore ; and his fierce and flashing eye, and knit determined brow, told that he was prepared to do those deeds which were once common among the children of his native land : 'Where ?' he demanded, and it was the only word he spoke.

'Down in yon meadow,' replied Flavia, 'over the brow of the hill. But listen ;—oh God ! they might yet be saved, if we had but fleet horses : there are few of the barbarians with them ; those few are revelling at their morning meal ; the rest are gone to pursue the party from Tricornium.'

'What party ?' cried Theodore : 'is there a chance of any aid ?'

'Alas, no ! my son,' she replied, in the same rapid tone ; 'alas, no ! We met a centurion and his soldiers coming from Tricornium to Margus, and while we were in parley with him the barbarians suddenly fell upon us, like a cloud of brown locusts upon the fertile land : there was resistance and strife, and I sought to flee with the children. I know not how it happened ; for it was like struggling with the waves of a tempestuous sea—all terrible, and nothing distinct ; but at length, when I could discern anything, I found myself alone, defended by Acer, the freedman, against a single Hun, who lingered behind to seize upon me as his prey, while the greater body of his companions pursued the centurion along the high road, and a few hurried down hither with their captives and plunder. Though wounded, the freedman defended me as if he had been a Roman, and struck the fierce barbarian with his spear a blow that made him fly ; but as he galloped off, he drew his bow, and in a moment an arrow was in Acer's heart. I was alone ; my children were in captivity ; and I followed hither : for I had only sought to save myself with them, but not to live without them.'

Theodore sprang to the ground. 'My mother,' he said, 'I will deliver them or die ;' and making the freedman dismount, he chose four to follow him, leaving the Arab Cremera to remain with Flavia. His orders were few, but they were distinct. 'When Eudochia, Ammian, Ildica, are here,' he said, addressing the freedmen, 'mount them and the Lady Flavia on the horses : speed back to Margus, and bid the bishop save them at any price. Should you find the city in the hands of the Huns, pronounce the name of Onegisus, and when you have found him, tell him, that the youth Theodore, to whom he made a promise, claims his protection for those who are most dear to him on earth.—Mother,' he continued, embracing Flavia, 'mother, I go !'

Flavia gazed mournfully in that sad, firm countenance. 'Theodore,' she said, pressing him in her arms, 'Theodore, thou goest to destruction !'

He made no reply, but wrung her hand ; and, waving to the slaves he had chosen to follow, burst from her embrace, and hurried over the hill.

In another moment, the resting-place of the Huns was before his eyes, though the branches of the trees still waved between him and them, affording concealment while he observed them. He paused but for an instant, but that instant sufficed to show him the barbarians scattered on both sides of the stream, gathered in groups of eight or ten, with their small rugged horses feeding beside them, and their weapons cast upon the turf whereon they sat. The heart of Theodore rose to see that they were so few, for not more than two hundred were there ; and the number of the captives, who sat apart, with bending heads, and the self-neglecting look of utter despair, had their arms been free, might have offered no slight support in the bold attempt he was about to make. 'Our object,' he said, turning to those who followed him, 'is to free Ildica, Eudochia, and Ammian. Let whoever reaches them first cut their bonds, and bid them fly up the road over the hill. Then free your fellows, and oppose the pursuit of the barbarians ! Thou art pale,' he added, addressing one of the freedmen ; 'thy lips are bloodless ; if thy heart be faint, turn back.'

'Thou goest to death,' replied the man firmly, 'and I will go with thee. I feel that death is horrible ; but it must be borne once, and I can bear it now.'

'Follow, then !' said Theodore, 'but cautiously, under the covering of the trees, till we are close upon them.'

It was a great, a mighty, a sublime thing, that determined resolution unto death, which possessed the young enthusiastic Roman ; which did away boyhood, and made him at

once a strong and valiant man in vigour, in powers, in intellect, in energy. To die for her he loved; to ransom her from the barbarians, at the price of his own blood; to see her for the last time as her deliverer, and to know in dying that his hand had freed her; was the last aspiration, the only remaining hope, that rested with Theodore, of all the many sweet and probable dreams of happiness which haunted his fancy but one short month before.

Calmly and deliberately he led the way through the trees, to a spot where, with irregular sweeps, the forest met the meadow. Within fifty yards sat Ildica and her companions, mourning, like the enslaved Hebrews, their captivity, by the banks of the strange waters. Beside them, as a sort of guard—though the bonds by which they were tied rendered their unassisted escape impossible—lay spread upon the grass some ten or twelve of the dark and filthy barbarians, with their rude and frightful countenances, scared with ancient gashes and sallow with long-accustomed dirt, distorted by wild merriment, as they feasted near the first captives whom they had taken in their invasion of the Roman state. At the feet of one who sat closest to the prisoners lay a gory human head, the short cut hair and beard of which showed that it had belonged to no barbarian form; and—while Theodore, pausing behind the trees, let his eye run over the other groups of Huns, as they were scattered about at a greater distance, some eating and drinking, some playing with their unbridled horses, some erecting tents of skins, as if their numbers were soon to be greatly increased—the fierce barbarian ended some speech in his own tongue by a wild and ringing laugh, and with a stroke of his foot kicked the trunkless head into the river.

It was the signal for his own destruction. 'On!' cried Theodore, 'on!' and, with the sudden stoop of the eagle on its prey, he bounded forward upon the barbarian. The Hun started on his feet, but that instant the sword of the young Roman cleft him to the eyes; and rolling back in the convulsive agonies of death, he plunged into the river, where he had so lately cast the head of his adversary.

Scarcely was the blow struck when it was followed by another, which laid a second Hun prostrate and disabled at his feet: two more fell before the spears of the freedmen; and the rest, conceiving that much greater numbers of enemies must be approaching, fled to their comrades further down the stream. There was a thirst in Theodore's heart to pursue and smite them still, but he remembered Ildica, and turned to where she sat. A moment freed her from her bonds: Eudochia and Ammian were set at liberty.

'Up! up! over the hill, beloved,' cried Theodore: 'quick as light, Ildica! No words! you will find horses ready.—Cut their bonds quick,' he continued, mingling his orders to the freedmen who had accompanied him, and to the captives as they were liberated 'Snatch up what arms you can find! There are the swords, and arrows, and javelins they have left behind. Fly, Ildica! I beseech you fly!—Ammian, hurry her and Eudochia up the hill; your mother is there with horses; we follow in a moment. Quick! quick! see the barbarians are pouring back upon us! form a phalanx across the road! Away, away! for God's sake! for my sake! Away, my Ildica!'

There was no time for further words; the Huns were upon them: but happily for Theodore, thirsty for immediate vengeance, they poured upon him with the sword and spear, instead of trusting to the missiles which they might have used with more fatal effect. Supported by twenty of the most resolute slaves and freedmen, some hastily equipped with the arms they had snatched up, some heaving masses of stone, the young Roman, active and skilful in the use of all the weapons of the day, barred the path between the Huns and their liberated captives, and met them with a courage and a fierceness even superior to their own. Every tree, every broken mass of rock, formed a point of resistance; and, though hurled against him with still increasing rage and impetus, the Huns recoiled, like javelins cast against a rock, leaving some of their number dead, or dying at his feet.

Each moment, however, their numbers increased, as the scattered parties from the different spots of that wide meadow hurried up to the scene of conflict; and Theodore, grim with the blood of many enemies, but, alas! not unstained with his own, slowly retired step by step towards the spot where the road entered the wood. There he had resolved to make his last stand and die; but ere he reached it, a broad tremendous form, which had just come up from the farther part of the meadow, mingled with his assailants, and, armed like himself with a heavy sword, seemed to single him out for destruction. His countenance, however, was nobler than that of the Huns in general, as his height was greater; and when Theodore heard him exclaim, in a tongue near akin to the Alan language, 'Leave him to me! leave him to me!' he thought that, if he must die, it might be sweeter by his hand.

Still, however, he contended with him with but little disadvantage; for, as a Roman, he had greater skill, if the barbarian had greater strength. Brow to brow, and hand to hand, blow following blow, and thrust succeeding thrust, they stood almost alone, while the

youth's companions were driven back; and with flashing eyes and slow irregular breath, pursued the lightning chances of the combat. Neither had gained a step, though Theodore's blood was trickling fast away, when a wild scream from the hill above caught his ear, unnerved his heart, and brought dim despair of his last dearest desire's result, like a dark cloud before his eyes.

He turned but for an instant to listen to that sound, but that instant was enough. His guard was beaten down; he fell upon his knee: though hope had abandoned him, courage had not, and he strove to struggle up, but it was in vain: his mighty adversary poured blow after blow upon the weak defence which his sword could now afford. He rose, fell again, staggered even upon his knee; exposed the arm which held the weapon over his head to the descending stroke of his enemy; dropped the sword itself from his disabled hand, and saw the shining steel, thirsting for his heart's last drop, raised high in air above his defenceless head. The hour he had expected had arrived, and he was prepared to die!

As with quick and heavy sweep the blow fell with a vehemence, which he himself who struck it could not restrain, another weapon interposed, caught the keen blade upon one no less strong, and turned the stroke aside.

'Spare him, Ardaric! spare him!' cried the deep tones of a voice that Theodore had heard before. 'Spare him, for love of me!'

The young Roman started on his feet, and gazed wildly round upon the scene about him. When last he had time to look around, nothing had been seen but some two hundred Huns contending with himself and his small faithful band. Now, sweeping round in a semicircle which hemmed him in, down to the very river's brink, was seen an innumerable multitude of those dark ferocious horsemen, while thousands on thousands more appeared streaming down from the road, and spreading themselves out over the whole meadow.

The space, for nearly forty cubits, immediately about himself and his adversary, was clear, except where stood beside him the same dark chief who had been his guide on the other side of the Danube, and where, a pace or two behind, a barbarian attendant held the powerful horse from which he had just sprung. But as Theodore gazed along the dusky line of savage foes around him, a sight more painful to his heart than the impending death which had just hung over him, struck his eyes. There, where a multitude of banners, rudely embroidered with a black eagle crowned, marked a particular spot in their irregular line, stood Flavia and her family, once more in the hands of the barbarians!

But the hope of still purchasing their safety followed instantly upon the agony of that sight. Theodore at once cast himself at the feet of the Hunnish chieftain. 'Oh, Onegisus!' he exclaimed, 'oh, noble Onegisus! Thou hast promised me, unasked, thy favour and protection. Now, for the first time that I have ever required a boon at the hands of man, I beseech thee to grant me one. Let this brave man, from whose arm thou hast just saved me, plunge his sword into my heart! But let yon women and children, bound to me by the ties of blood and love, go free! Send them, oh send them to the dwellings of my mother's race, beneath the snowy alps, where they may find safety and protection! I adjure thee, by the God in whom I believe! I adjure thee, by the gods whom thou thyself worshippest! Spare them, oh, spare them, and send them forth in peace!'

The dark chieftain gazed upon him for a moment with an aspect stern but not fierce.

'Ardaric,' he said at length, 'he is the captive of thy hand. Wilt thou give him unto me, and the first ten captives that I make they shall be thine?'

The other chieftain, whose brow had relaxed from the stern frown of contest, and on whose face was a mild and not unpleasing smile, thrust his sword back into the scabbard, saying, 'I give them to thee all, oh, mighty king! I give them to thee, without recompense or bargain. Let them be the first spoil taken in the land of the Romans, which Ardaric offers to Attila the king.'

At that tremendous name, already shadowed over with a cloud of vague but fearful rumours of wide lands conquered, kings bent to homage, and nations, as savage as that over which he ruled, overthrown by that mighty hand, Theodore drew a step back, and gazed with doubt and surprise on the dark features and sinewy limbs of him who had just saved his life; and if his feelings had been strange and mysterious when he had first seen that powerful but ill-proportioned form, what were they now, when he heard the stranger called by that fearful name!

'I am Attila!' said the monarch, answering his wondering and inquiring look. 'What sayest thou now, young man? If I will send these women and slaves free, and on their way, wilt thou be the bondman of Attila?'

'Oh, not a bondman!' said Theodore, letting his head droop upon his bosom: 'I can die, oh, monarch! but I cannot be a bondman! Let him slay me, and let them go free; but bind not the limbs of a free Roman!'

Attila gazed on him awhile with the same grave, majestic air which he had never lost, even for a moment, and then added, 'I understand thee: I will not bind thy hands; I will

not demand thy service against thy native land—thou shalt draw no sword for Attila against Rome—thou shalt fill no servile employ—honoured and caressed, thou shalt be the friend of Attila, and if thou showest the same wisdom in other matters as in this, thou shalt be his counsellor also. Not his first friend—not his first counsellor,' he added, 'for here stands Ardaric, whose place none can supply; and yonder is Onegisus, found faithful in all things—but thou shalt be amongst the first. Hearken, thou shalt promise me for seven years to be to me a faithful friend and counsellor—except in war or counsel against thy native land; and I will send these thy people upon their way, with the king's pledge for their safety till they reach the land of thy kindred.'

'Surely the king has some secret motive!' exclaimed Ardaric, king of the tributary, or rather subject, nation of the Gepidæ—'surely the king has some secret motive for showing this favour to a captive—though the boy is brave!'

'I have, Ardaric!' replied Attila, 'I have! There is a strange bond between me and him, but that matters not. Wilt thou accept the offer, youth?'

'I will!' replied Theodore; 'but cannot they go with me?' and he pointed with his hand to Flavia and her companions.

'Thou knowest not what thou askest?' cried the king, with a cloud darkening on his brow. 'It were evil with them, and not good, to go. I will send them in safety and in honour to the land of the Alani, if thou wilt be as obedient to my commands as a son to a father's during seven years, except in the things which are against thy country. Dost thou accept the terms?'

'I do,' replied Theodore, 'I do; and deep and heartfelt gratitude will I ever show to thee, oh monarch, for thus befriending me in my hour of need!'

'For seven years!' said the monarch, gazing up thoughtfully towards the sky, while the light of wild but mighty aspirations illuminated his harsh but striking features—'for seven years! Ere seven years have fled, I shall have conquered the whole earth!'

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE PARTING.

A SILENT pause of several minutes ensued, while the terrible monarch of the Huns thus suffered to burst forth so clear an indication of his hopes and purposes; and as he stood in the midst, still gazing up to the sky, with each firm and powerful limb in statue-like repose, his feet planted on the earth, as if rooted to it, his broad chest thrown open, and his wide square forehead lifted to the morning sun, there was an air of might and majesty in his whole appearance which impressed those who beheld him with a belief in his power to accomplish fully that which he so boldly planned. Though far less in height than the chief of Gepidæ, yet Ardaric gazed upon him with reverence and awe; and Theodore, as he beheld him, and traced the light of potent intellect flashing from those dark eyes, while his lip pronounced his vast designs, could not but feel that there stood the most dangerous enemy that Rome had ever known.

At length Attila recalled his thoughts from those dreams of conquest, and, waving his hand towards the spot where the standards of his nation were gathered together, he exclaimed, in a voice which, though not apparently loud, came deep and distinct to every ear around: 'Edicon! Edicon, come hither!'

A tall dark man, with the shrewd face of a Greek, but the air and expression of a barbarian, sprang from his horse, and advanced a pace or two into the open space around the king; but as he came forward, Attila bade him bring the principal captives with him; and pale, faint, and sick at heart, Flavia and her family, uncertain either of their own fate or of his, so closely, so dearly linked with them, approached the spot where the dark monarch stood with his naked sword still clasped in his sinewy hand. As they came near, the joy of having saved them burst all restraint, and Theodore, though the blood was still dropping from his garments, clasped them one by one in a brief but joyful embrace.

'You are safe, my mother!' he cried; 'you are safe, my Ildica! Ammian, Eudochia, you are safe! you are safe, and at liberty! The king will send you securely to the land of the Alani.'

'And you, my son, are a slave!' said Flavia. 'You are a slave, and we shall never see you more!'

'Not so!' said Attila, gazing upon the group, and somewhat moved by their meeting. 'He is no slave, but has bound himself to dwell with Attila not less than seven years. Neither do I ask him to war against his country—it would be doing wrong unto his nature; but I ask him to be a faithful and true friend to him who has saved his life, in every other thing. Edicon, thou art a scribe: write down this compact between Attila the king, and Theodore the son of Paulinus, in order that no one may ever doubt that he did

not betray his native land, or that Attila could not be generous to his enemy.'

He spoke in the Latin tongue, and though he used not that language with ease, yet his meaning was distinct, and Flavia replied: 'Act ever thus, oh, monarch! and thou shalt conquer more by thy generosity than by the sword!' A hope might, perhaps, have crossed her mind, even while she spoke, that in so free and kindly a mood the monarch of the Huns might be induced to suffer her and her children to take up their abode in the same land with Theodore; but she thought of Ildica, of her young blossoming beauty, of her tender nurture, and her graceful mind, and she repressed the wish ere it was spoken: all she added was, 'Oh, keep him not from us for ever!'

'I have pledged and plighted my word,' replied the king, 'that in seven years he shall be free to leave me if he will. More: if he show himself as faithful to me as he has been to his country, he shall, from time to time, have leave and opportunity to visit those he loves. But I have mightier things to think of now,' he continued: 'wait ye here, till I provide for your safety. Ardaric, come thou with me; I go to tread upon the necks of the Romans.' Thus saying, he sprang upon his horse, and issued a few brief commands in the Hunnic tongue. The dark masses of the barbarian horse began to move on by the river side, as if towards Idimum; and while they swept along, like the shadow of a cloud over a field of green corn, the monarch continued conversing with his attendant, Edicon, without farther notice of the captives. At length, when Theodore saw him about to depart, he ventured to ask, 'Go you to Margus, oh king?'

Attila looked upon him with a smile so slight that it scarcely curled his lip, and replied: 'Margus was mine ere I came hither! My people are skilful in dressing wounds,' he added; 'let them tend thine, for thou art bleeding still.'

As he spoke, he raised his hand slightly on the bridle of his horse; the beast sprang forward across the meadow, and, followed by a troop of Huns who had remained upon the left, Attila galloped on in the same direction which his host had taken before him.

Only two bodies of barbarians continued upon the field; one, consisting of perhaps an hundred men, remained with Edicon, near the spot where Theodore and his companions stood; the other, fewer in number, were gathered farther down in the meadow, near which the struggle between Theodore and the Huns for the deliverance of the captives had first commenced. A glance showed the young Roman that they were in the act of removing, or burying, the dead; but objects of deeper interest called his attention elsewhere, for Flavia, Eudochia, Ammian, Ildica, gathered round him, gazing in his face, pale as it was with loss of blood, and looking upon him with the thankful eyes of beings whom he had delivered from bondage worse than death. How he had delivered them, by what means, or by what motives in the breast of the Hun that deliverance had been accomplished, was strange and incomprehensible to them all, even to Theodore himself; but that it was by his agency, on account of his valour, constancy, and faithfulness, none of them for a moment doubted; and as Ildica raised her large dark eyes to his face, they were full at once of love, of admiration, and of gratitude.

Oh, who can tell the mingled feelings of that hour, when sitting round him they loved—while one of the rude Huns, with the peculiar appliances of his nation, stanched the trickling blood, and dressed his many wounds—those who had lately given way to despair, now spoke to each other the few glad words of reviving hope! Oh! who can tell the deep and fervid yearnings of the heart towards God in thankfulness for the mighty mercy just vouchsafed! Oh, who can tell the thrilling, the ecstatic sense of security, of peace, and of happy expectation which succeeded, after having been plunged in such a depth of grief, of care, and agony!

What though their thoughts might wander on into the vague future, and sad experience might cause a fear to cast its shadow over the prospect! What though Flavia's heart might feel a chilliness at the idea of strange lands, strange habits, and strange nations! What though Ildica and Theodore might look upon a probable separation of seven long years with grief and regret; yet, oh, how such pitiful alloy sunk into nothing when mingled with the golden happiness of knowing that safety, liberty, and peace had been obtained after so fearful a struggle! Could Theodore gaze upon the lovely and beloved form of the sweet Dalmatian girl, and know how fearful a fate might have befallen her, without feeling that life itself would have been a poor sacrifice to save her from such a doom? Could Ildica behold her lover, and recall the moments when last she saw him surrounded by fierce foes, and determined to die, that he might give her a chance of liberty, without feeling that a seven years' absence was but a cheap price for the life and safety of so noble, so devoted a being

To part—to part perhaps for seven long solitary years—would, in happier days, have seemed a fate too bitter for endurance; but now the dark and fearful images from which that lot stood forth, made it look bright and smiling. The hour of horror and danger had passed by, despair had given way; and though

fear still lived, yet hope, hope was the victor for the time.

Their words were few but sweet, and they were uninterrupted; for the Huns, after the youth's wounds were dressed, pointed out to them some shady trees as a place to repose, and left them unrestrained, and almost unwatched. The barbarians knew well that the whole land around was in their king's possession, and feared not that any one could escape. The words of the captives, I have said, were few, but still those words were not unimportant, for they went to regulate the future fate of all. Each promised, when occasion served, to give tidings of their health and prospects, hopes and wishes, to a mutual relation in Rome, the noble Julius Lentulus, and each unloaded the mind to the other of every feeling which, in a moment such as that, the heart could experience—of every thought which the memory could recall.

As they thus sat and conversed, the slaves and attendants who had been captured with them crept gradually nearer and nearer, not yet comprehending fully the situation in which they were placed; feeling themselves to be prisoners, and yet marvelling that their limbs remained untied, after such a bold effort to escape, when they had been bound with leathern thongs before. Nearly one half, however, of the freedmen were absent; and painful sensations passed through the hearts of Theodore and Flavia, when they looked around, and missed some old familiar face; but neither spoke their feelings on this point to the other. As the sun passed the meridian, however, two or three Huns from time to time came riding down the road, driving before them, with their short spears, several of the absent attendants; and while the day went on, a considerable part of the baggage, whereof Flavia's company had been pillaged on their first capture, was brought back, without a word of explanation, and piled up round the trees underneath which she sat. Strange is it and unaccountable how the heart of man, which despises many a mighty warning, draws auguries for its hopes and fears from the pettiest occurrences that befall us in our course through life. When Flavia, and Ildica, and Theodore saw the litters, and chairs, and chariots, and bales of goods restored, and laid down in silence, a well-pleased smile beamed upon the face of each; not that either thought at that moment of comfort or convenience, or of all the little luxuries which the glass of civilisation magnifies into necessaries; but that each one thence drew a renewed assurance that the barbarian monarch, into whose hands they had fallen, however fierce and blood-thirsty he might have shown himself to others, at all events meant well and kindly towards them.

Towards the third hour after noon, food rudely cooked, and a beverage peculiar to the people of Dacia, was set before them; and Edicon, sitting down to meat with them, pressed them to their meal, using the Latin tongue as purely as if it had been his own. He spoke of the empire of the Huns, of their might, their conquests, and their innumerable hordes; he spoke even of Bleda, the brother of the king, and monarch of one part of the nation: but the name of Attila he pronounced not; and when it was mentioned by Theodore he turned quickly to some other theme.

The sun had lost much of its heat by the time the meal was concluded; and shortly after a Hunnish horseman came down the road with fiery speed, and addressed a few quick words to Edicon.

That chief instantly turned and addressed Flavia. 'Tricornium and Singidunum have fallen,' he said, 'and the way is clear before you. It is the will of the king that you commence your journey.'

Flavia gazed upon Theodore, and Theodore upon those he loved; and the bright drops clustered in the dark eyes of Ildica, like dew in the half-closed leaves of the morning. Eudochia, too, hung upon her brother's neck, and Ammian grasped his hand; but still the son of Flavia, with wilder and less regulated feelings than the rest, could not yet understand or appreciate the grief of Theodore at that moment of parting. 'Would I were you, Theodore!' he exclaimed. 'Gladly, would I see the country and manners of these wild Huns; and, oh, if I had a father's murder to avenge as you have, I would march on with that brave and mighty Attila, and smite the tyrant, Theodosius, on his throne.'

'Could it be without the ruin of my country,' replied Theodore; 'but, alas, Ammian, that cannot be. Weep not, dear Ildica! Sorrow not, my mother, that for a time you must leave me here. Let us remember our condition a few hours ago, and be thankful to God that it is as it is even now. Far safer, too, are you under the guidance and protection of these powerful barbarians, than if, unaided and unguarded, we had attempted to penetrate into Noricum: far safer am I left here, with those who have spared me even when my sword was drawn against them, than if I were attempting to guide you through strange lands that I know not, and barbarian people who hate us for our very civilisation. I trust implicitly to the word of Attila. He has promised us his favour and protection, and I fear not.'

'Thou judgest rightly, Roman,' joined in Edicon, who still stood by. 'The word of Attila, whether for good or bad, has never yet been broken. His sentence is irreversible, his

mind unchangeable. Fear nothing for the safety of your friends. Two hundred of our bravest warriors guard them to Singidunum, whence a tribe of the Heruli, with a messenger from the king, convey them onward to their destination. They are safe wherever they go, for Attila has promised them protection; and is not Attila lord of the earth?'

Still Ildica clung to him, still Flavia gazed upon him with wistful affection; and the heart of Theodore, while they prepared once more for their journey, swelled with feelings too painful for utterance. Weakened with loss of blood, wearied with terrible exertion, and forced to part for long, dim, uncertain years from those whom alone he loved on earth, his manly fortitude wavered, but the presence of the Huns and the pride of a Roman sustained him. He could not bear that barbarians should see him weep; and though he held them one by one to his bosom in the warm embrace of passionate affection—though he spoke to the very slaves and freedmen with the tenderness of old and fond regard—though he looked upon each familiar face and long remembered feature with the clinging earnestness of love—yet he mastered the emotions of his bosom, and saw them prepared to go without a tear moistening his eye. One last kiss, one long dear embrace, and Theodore turned away. Then came the sound of many feet, the neighing of horses, the cries of barbarian voices in the tone of command, the rustling and the rush of a moving crowd. Gradually the noise became less, the tongues sounded more faintly, the tramp of feet subsided into a lower and a lower murmur, and Theodore, looking round, found himself left alone, amidst a small party of the Huns, with a feeling of deep desolation at his heart, such as he had never known before.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE DESOLATION.

A LONG deep sigh was all that Theodore would now give to the pain of parting. It was over, finished and endured! and he stood there, calm but grave, prepared for the long cold lapse of the next seven years. Oh, sad and sorrowful is it, more melancholy, if not more painful, than any other state of human being—fertile as existence is in woes and miseries—when over the summer and the sunshiny days of early youth are brought the premature storms of manhood, the hurricane of angry passions, or the deep and settled clouds of disappointment and despair! Oh, sad and sorrowful is it, when the half-open flower of the heart is broken off by the rude footstep of adverse fate ere it has time to expand into beauty! Oh, sad and sorrowful is it, when by the rough hand of circumstance the fresh bloom is brushed from the fruit ere it be ripe!

Yet such was the fate of Theodore. Endowed with ardent feelings, strong passions, powerful energies both of mind and body, he had been called, while those feelings were in their first freshness, while those passions were in their early fervour, ere those energies had been strengthened by time or instructed by experience, to mingle with scenes, and take part in events, which few even of the mightiest and most mature minds of accomplished manhood could pass through, without bearing away the indelible stains left by feelings blighted, or the rude scars inflicted by evil passions. He had loved, and he had been beloved. He had tasted once of the nectar cup of the gods, which, when pressed by a pure lip, instils into the heart a spirit of immortality—and his lip had pressed it purely. Then had been called forth the exertion of that great attribute of manhood, the power of protecting, aiding, directing weaker beings in moments of terror and danger. Then came the mingling of that most bitter draught, when grief and indignation are all that are offered to allay the thirst of a lip burning for revenge. Then came the ignominy of flight from an enemy alike hated and despised; then the temptation conquered, to pamper vengeance by treason; and then the mighty struggle where life was played for as a dicer's stake, and every energy of heart and brain was called into fierce activity, when human blood was spilt, and mortal being extinguished by his hand, to save from death, or worse than death, those he most loved on earth. And there he now stood, that wayward-fated being, around whom within the last month so many lightnings had played, left alone amidst men with whom he had no community of feeling.

Those hours of agony and excitement had indeed made him a man before his time, and well, well might they take the bloom off his young heart; yet though the syren voice of expectation might have lost part of its sweetness, though the chord which once vibrated to every joy might possess no longer its elastic tone; though there was the grey shade of doubt mingling with every bright colour which went to paint the future, and the enchanter could charm no more; still there was within his bosom, in his love for Ildica, a sweet source of unpolluted happiness, a well of youthful feelings undefiled, a fountain of bright clear waters, where wearied hope

might come and drink and be refreshed. As he stood there in his loneliness, the value of that spring of secret enjoyment was displayed in all its brightness. He knew, he felt, that there was his treasure; and, with that support and conscious innocence alone, he prepared to face the future be it what it might.

The rapid process of thought had ran over in a few minutes all the varied particulars of his situation, the much of gloomy and dark, and the small but intense spot of guiding light; and ere the few Huns who remained with him showed any disposition to move, he himself turned towards their leader, and demanded what was to ensue.

'Are you able to sit a horse?' demanded Edicon, gazing on his features, still pale with loss of blood.

'I am,' replied Theodore, 'if the journey be not long.'

'Then we must follow the king,' replied Edicon; 'but I have his commands to make the stations suit your capability. There is your sword,' he continued, giving him the weapon which had dropped from his hand when the blow of Ardaric had for the time disabled his right arm. 'You are to be treated in no way as a bondman.'

'Keep it for me,' replied Theodore, putting it aside with the back of his hand; 'I will never go armed into my native land, with the enemies of my country.'

Edicon laughed aloud. 'Is there any thing else,' he demanded, 'that your fancy would have? I am ordered to humour thee to the utmost.'

'There was one faithful freedman,' said Theodore, 'whom I saw not with the rest who departed just now. I would gladly hear of his fate: I left him with the horses on the hill.'

'What! a giant?' demanded Edicon. 'I saw such an one contending like a madman with our whole army. If it be of him you speak, most probably he is dead. I saw him fall beneath a blow which would have slain a bull. At all events, he is in the hands of Attila the King; for I heard him bid his people see to the brave African. Is there aught else?'

'I would fain,' said Theodore, with a sigh, 'I would fain recover the horse I rode. It was my father's charger; but I fear that it is vain, for I left it upon the hill.'

'What! the black horse with the white star on his forehead?' demanded Edicon.

'The same,' answered Theodore, with some surprise. 'Have you seen him?'

'I saw him with you on the other side of the Danube some four days ago,' replied Edicon, 'when Attila came down from the interior to meet you.'

'To meet me!' exclaimed Theodore with a faint smile, 'he could not come to meet me; for I crossed the Danube by accident, not from any long-conceived purpose.'

'So it might be,' answered the chief, 'and yet the king knew that you were coming, and went down to meet you. Do you not believe that there are men who see the coming events as clearly as we see the past? But it matters not,' he added; 'we left the tribe of Vultingours upon the hill. Perchance the horse may have fallen into their hands; if so, thou shalt have him.'

He then spoke a few words in their own tongue to some of the Huns near, two of whom instantly sprang upon their horses, and galloped up the hill. While they were gone, Theodore and Edicon lay down in the shade upon the grass; and the young Roman endeavoured to induce his companion to pursue to some clearer point of explanation the vague hints which had been given regarding his first meeting with Attila: but the wily barbarian was not to be led onward beyond the precise line by which he chose to bound his communication; and as soon as Theodore attempted to gain further information, he started up, and busied himself in giving orders to the wild warriors around him.

In a few minutes the two Huns returned, leading down at a quick pace the horse of the young Roman, which, snorting and rearing, resisted the unfamiliar hands by which he was guided. In a moment, however, the voice of his master rendered him tame and docile as a lamb; and Theodore could perceive, by the smiles and gestures of the barbarians, whose affection for, and command over, their own horses were even then proverbial, that he had risen highly in their esteem by the love and obedience which the noble beast displayed towards him.

When at length all was prepared, he mounted, though with much pain and difficulty from his wounds; but when once on his horse's back he experienced no farther inconvenience, except from weakness; and riding side by side with Edicon, he proceeded slowly on the same track which Attila and his troops had previously taken.

A little farther to the east, the woods again swept down to the very banks, seeming to present an impervious barrier against their advance in that direction; but still the Scythian horsemen rode on direct towards the forest, and separating on the very edge, each took his path by himself, winding along with extraordinary skill and dexterity, and keeping up their communication with each other by shrill sharp cries. They had apparently left the direction taken by Attila and his myriads; for the grass of the forest bore no trace of having been trodden down by the feet of those innumerable horsemen; and the green

boughs on either side, clad in the refreshing garmenture of the early year, neither scorched by the summer's sun nor withered by the autumn's wind, were unbroken and undisturbed. With slow and heavy wing rose up the feathered tenants of the wood, on the passage of strangers through those spots of which they had held solitary possession for so many years: the beasts started away from their path, almost under the horses' feet; and every thing indicated that calm tranquillity had reigned there for many a year, while the civilised world beyond had been torn by faction, turbulence, and war.

For nearly three miles the branch of the great Dacian forest which they were now traversing continued unbroken, but at the end of that distance it again suddenly ceased, and issuing out upon a wide savannah, the little band of Huns reunited, and rode rapidly on. Another wood succeeded, but of less extent, and bearing evident traces, in many parts, of the destroying axe. It, too, was soon crossed, and when Theodore had again reached its extreme limit, another scene, more gloomy, more painful, more terrible, broke upon his eye.

It was a cultivated land laid desolate! The corn, just losing its fresh green and touched with the golden hand of summer, was beaten down, and trodden into the very ground from which it grew; the fences and partitions were swept away, and the scattered remnants thereof, mingled with the produce which they were intended to protect, spread wide over the trampled and ruined country. The huts and cottages of a lowly but industrious population were seen around; but the roofs had fallen in, and the blackened and smouldering rafters told the tale of destruction but too well. In the midst of the field lay a husbandman with a javelin wound in his throat, and at the door of one of the cottages, stretched across that threshold which her feet had so often passed with joy and gladness, was the body of a young mother, with her golden hair streaming on the ground, her white arms extended motionless above her head, now tranquil in death, but telling still the tale of agonised emotion passed, of supplication urged in vain, and unanswered appeals unto mysterious heaven: and there, beside her, seeking with plaintive cries its wonted food, crept on towards her bosom her infant child, its little hands dabbling in the stream of gore that welled from the fond loved home of infancy, the dear maternal breast, now for ever cold and feelingless.

'Oh God, the child!' cried Theodore, as they rode by.

Edicon gazed on it with a stern dark brow. 'There will be many such,' he said, and it was all his reply.

The young Roman's heart swelled within him with the choking agony of fruitless indignation. He could do nought to succour, to save, or to defend; and bending down his eyes upon the arching neck of his proud charger, he strove not to see the many miseries of the land through which he passed. He could not shut his eyes to all, however. Every now and then the horse would recoil from a corpse stretched across his way. Every now and then the crashing fall of some burning cottage or Roman watch-tower, which were thick upon the road towards Viminacium, would make him start and look up, and behold new traces of ruin, slaughter, and desolation.

They passed by a hamlet where once many happy hearths had gathered round a small Christian church; but the hearths were strewed with the rafters that had covered them; the voice of the pastor and the hearts of the congregation were now still in death; the church was void, its walls smoking, its pavements stained with blood, and its altar profaned; and silence reigned equally where the merry laugh and the gay song had rejoiced in the blessings of God, and where the voice of supplication or of gratitude had been raised to him in prayer or adoration.

They passed by a villa built in the graceful and the mighty times of Trajan, while the name of Rome was awful over all the earth; but its halls and vestibules, its courts and gardens, were strewed with its fragments of works of art, and blackened with the fire which had destroyed its fair proportions.

Oh, how glad was Theodore, when the grey coming on of twilight gave him the hope that night would soon shut out from his weary eyes the sight of such scenes of horror and devastation. But, alas! even when darkness spread over the whole sky, the earth beneath—as he rode along, across the high grounds which there sweep down to the Danube—seemed glowing in a thousand spots with the lurid light of wide-spread conflagration; and Theodore beheld the destiny of his native land. Fire consumed each dwelling's roof-tree, and blood drowned out the ashes.

At length, at the bottom of the hills, where a small wood skirted one of the little rivers they had to cross, they came suddenly upon a number of fires, round which were seated some thousands of the barbarians. On the approach of Edicon and his party, numbers of them started up, and quitting the loud rude merrymaking in which they were engaged, gathered around the new comers, with wild gestures and quick vociferous tongues, talking, laughing, shouting, and screaming, while the fitful gleams of the fire displayed, in strong unpleasant light and shade, their strange attire and harsh, repulsive countenances. Food of various kinds and in great

abundance was set before Theodore and those who escorted him; but the young Roman felt no power to eat, and only quenched the burning of his lip, while he strove to drown remembrance of his griefs, in two full cups of wine.

'We must on with the first light to-morrow morning,' said Edicon, 'and therefore it were better for you to take what sleep you can, though, perhaps, being a Roman, you cannot find slumber on such a couch as nature provided for man, and under such a tent as the starry sky.'

'Sleep!' cried Theodore; 'sleep! Do you expect me to sleep after such a day as this? Such sleep, however, as I can gain may as well be taken here as anywhere else,' and wrapping his mantle round his head, he cast himself down near one of the fires. For repose he sought not, for he neither hoped nor expected to find it, but he sought to shut out from his sight the fierce forms and savage merriment of those who had just devastated his country. With his eyes closed, and his mantle round his head, he saw them not, it is true, but still the wild peals of barbarian laughter rang in his ears, as they caroused around the fires; still imagination called up to his view the rude, ill-favoured countenances of the Huns; still memory presented to his fevered brain all the sad and painful sights which he had beheld during the day.

Thus passed by the greater part of the night; for, even when the Huns, giving themselves up to slumber, left silence to recover her empire over the scene from which their rude revels had banished her, bitter remembrance haunted the young Roman still, and drove far away from his troubled breast that soft and soothing guest which visits so unwillingly the couch of pain or woe. About an hour before dawn, exhaustion, however, conquered thought; and when Edicon roused him to proceed, he was sleeping, if the name of sleep could be applied to that dull, unrefreshing want of consciousness into which he had fallen for the time. He started up, however, ready to go on, ay, and willing; for although he could hope to find but little better or fairer in the things before him, yet every scene in which he was placed was, for the time, so hateful to him, that it was a relief and consolation even to change.

The road lay still by the side of the Danube; but, after leaving their night's resting-place, it was evident that they were coming fast upon the great host of Attila himself. Multitudes of small wagons covered the way. Thousands of straggling parties were seen in every direction; and at length, after riding on for about two hours, they came in sight of the towers of a city, rising up from the banks of the river. At the same moment, as they stood upon the hill above it, a shout came up to the ear so loud, so fierce, so demoniacal, that it seemed to Theodore that the very fiends of hell had burst forth to mingle with the dark innumerable multitudes that he beheld whirling round that devoted town, like the waves of some mighty vortex in the stormy oceans of the north.

Another and another yell succeeded; and, as Edicon still led on down the hill, screams of anguish could be distinguished mixing with the shout, and fire might be seen bursting forth from various parts of the city.

'Viminacium is taken!' said the Hunnish leader: 'we shall find the king in the market-place; ride close by me, and let us on.'

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE CAPTURED CITY.

In one dark, close rushing stream the Huns were pouring into Viminacium, when Theodore, with unutterable agony of heart, approached the gates with those who held him a prisoner. It was an hour in which he could full well have died with scarcely a regret, for every sight and every sound around him spoke nothing but despair.

A few words from his conductor brought the barbarians who accompanied them pressing round the young Roman, so as to keep him distinct from all the multitude which had followed Attila to his first actual conquest in the Roman territory. But so dense, so rapid, was that living torrent, that after they had once entered the gates no one could move except in the same onward course; and, knee pressed against knee, horse jostling horse, forward they rushed, while nothing could be seen in the dark long street but an ocean of human heads, except where the flames burst forth from dwellings, palaces, and temples, and formed a fiery canopy above them.

To see beneath the horses' feet was not possible; but every now and then some dreadful indications, on which it were needless to dwell, showed Theodore that his charger's feet were passing over a pile of dead; and still, amidst the clang and rush of those wild horsemen, burst forth from other parts of the city the same long, piercing, awful shrieks, which told that the work of massacre had not yet ceased within those ill-starred walls. Wherever, too, a street, branching to either side, gave a momentary view of what was passing beyond, groups of struggling forms were seen, with heaps of corpses, falling houses, and masterless horses galloping

hither and thither, and rolling clouds of smoke writhing in dark masses amidst the building.

Still, however, Edicon pursued his way straight on, though at every turning some body of the Huns quitted the onward path, bent on plunder or on bloodshed. At length the way opened out into the forum, whose wide space was covered with scattered groups of the barbarian host, whirling here and there, in obedience to commands emanating from a group who had forced their horses up the steps leading to the temple of Mars.

Here, in the forum, the Roman legionaries had made their last stand; and here, thick and many, lay the bodies of those slain by hands that had never learned to spare. Here, too, dismounted from their horses, and stripping the yet warm dead of their rich arms and vestments, were thousands of blood-stained groups of the conquerors; and here, penned up, and dying man by man, was the last determined cohort which resisted the barbarian force. Even at that very moment, as Edicon was forcing his way onward, that last lingering spark of resistance was extinguished; for Theodore could see one Hunnish horseman, followed by several others, urge his horse fiercely down the steep steps of the temple, and plunge into the midst of the multitude which was pressing round the last brave men of Viminacium. A loud shout burst from the barbarians as that horseman hurled himself forward like a thunderbolt against the front of the cohort. Its line, which had remained firm even in despair, was rent in a moment, as an oak that has withstood the winds is rent by the lightning, and the Roman helmets disappeared in the dark mass of the Huns. Again that same horseman separated himself from the multitude, rode slowly back towards the temple, and urged his horse once more up the steep and slippery steps. Towards him Edicon pursued his way; and, as they came near, Theodore perceived that it was indeed towards him their journey had been directed.

There, advanced before the rest, Attila sate gazing from his battle-horse's back over the awful scene before his eyes; while near him an equestrian statue of Trajan, with his calm thoughtful features, and a bronze group of a lion tearing a bull, contrasted strangely, and harmonised well, with the fierce and heated aspect of the stern Hun, as, covered with blood and dust, he rolled his flashing dark eyes over that terrible scene of massacre, fire, and desolation.

'Oh,' cried Theodore, as they came near the steps, 'oh, beseech him to sheath the sword, and spare the unresisting!' and as he spoke he naturally urged on his horse, to plead the cause of his miserable countrymen with one who had shown himself, in his own case, not insensible to pity.

But Edicon caught his brible quickly, exclaiming, 'Speak to him not! speak to him not, if you value life! See you not that the mighty spirit of war is upon him. Speak to a hungry lion tasting the first blood! Plead with the tiger for its prey! But cross not Attila in his hour of battle and victory! Bleda, his brother, might hear you, and spare you at the time to slay you for his pleasure after; but were you to cross Attila now, he might strike dead the man whom to-morrow he would cherish as a son.'

At that moment, however, the eye of the monarch lighted on the garb of Theodore, 'A Roman!' he cried; 'a Roman before my eyes! Smite him to the ground! Give his heart to the vultures!'

The youth understood not his words, which were spoken in the Hunnish tongue, but the fierce gestures of the barbarian king were enough; and at the same moment a hundred spears were raised around to drink the Roman's blood.

'Let them do their will,' he said, calmly; 'let them do their will. Who would love life after such sights as these?'

But Edicon interposed. 'Hold!' he cried, to those so prompt to obey in any work of blood; 'hold! he is the king's friend. Attila knows him not. Oh, king!' he continued, raising his voice, 'thou hast promised this youth protection: wilt thou break thy promise?'

Attila rolled his eyes over the whole group in silence; and Edicon, with those who surrounded him, well knowing that the fierce and eager mood of their lord would pass away, retired slowly from his sight, leading Theodore with them. No tranquil spot, however, no place of refuge or repose, did that wide city now contain. Plunder was still going on, though slaughter, insatiable still, even when gorging upon thousands, had exhausted nearly all, but only halted for want of food. Some wretched woman, indeed, or some helpless child, was dragged every now and then from its ineffectual hiding-place, and a solitary scream, or a dying groan, marked the new victim. But the work of butchery was now well nigh complete; and conflagration, spreading rapidly in every part, threatened to consume the barbarian victors themselves, in the burning city which they had captured and destroyed.

A small open space, near what was called Trajan's Gate, at length afforded a place of repose to Edicon and his party; and there, following the example of the Huns, Theodore alighted from his horse, and sitting down upon one of the massy stone-steps before a dwelling which had once belonged to some

rich banker, and had been one of the first to be plundered by the barbarians, he covered his eyes with his hands, and tried to shut out even from memory the horrors which he had just beheld.

In vain—it was in vain! Confused, countless, terrible images and feelings of destruction and despair rushed through his burning brain, and his indignant heart, and drove him well nigh to madness. At length two or three wild notes of some barbarian trumpet, loud, long, and melancholy, sounded through the streets, and were heard above the general roar of the Hunnish multitudes, coming from different quarters of the city. Edicon sprang up, and mounted his horse; and, seeing Theodore remain in the same attitude of despair, he exclaimed, 'Up, up, we must away! It is dangerous to linger.'

Theodore rose slowly; and though the curling flames which at once struck his eye, flickering above all the buildings around, together with the shower of sparks and flakes of fire, which were falling incessantly from the dense and lurid clouds of smoke above, showed that the words of Edicon were true, and that the warning voice of the trumpet had only been sounded in time, yet slow and heavily did the young Roman rise, as if he would willingly have remained to die in the flames of that vast holocaust to the barbarian god of warfare. In vain the Huns urged him to haste: he gazed upon them dark and gloomily, as if the bitterness of death itself were passed, and they, with all their power, could do no more.

With strange and unusual gentleness for one of so fierce and uncontrollable a nation, Edicon endeavoured to persuade him to follow them from the captured city. He offered no violence, he used no rude command; but after every other argument had failed to quicken the movements of the young Roman, he added, as if he could have divined the only chord which—left strung and resonant, where so many were broken—could still vibrate to the touch, 'Remember that there are others in the world to whom your life is dear; beings kind, beautiful, and beloved, who may need the protection of your arm, the consolation of your affection, and the shelter of your breast.'

The tears rose in Theodore's eyes; but the thrilling life of human hopes and fears was once more kindled from among the dead ashes of despair; and, springing on his horse, he followed wherever they would.

Wild and terrible, and extraordinary was the scene of confusion and disarray which followed, while the Huns, some fast and eagerly, some lingering with their appetite for plunder still unsated, poured forth from the gates of the burning city. Order and ranks were there none. Tumult and confusion, loud cries, wild laughter, shouts of triumph and barbarous songs, dark masses whirling hither and thither, horses, which had lost their masters, seeking them familiarly through the crowd, the rush of innumerable multitudes and the mighty hum of congregated myriads, formed all that was seen and heard over the wide green fields, which surrounded what a few hours before had been Viminacium—except when, loud and slow, surmounting every other noise, were heard the long melancholy notes of the barbarian trumpet, calling the conquerors from the work of spoil and desolation.

Sweeping round in a semicircle upon the declivity of the hills which domineered the city, the host of Attila was at length gathered together, at the end of about two hours after Theodore had seen the barbarian monarch in the forum. The youth had sat apart upon the edge of the hill, gloomily gazing upon the dim multitudes, as they covered and struggled up the intervening space between the walls and the spot where he was placed. The same party of Huns which had always hitherto accompanied him, more to protect than to detain him, remained with him still, except, indeed, Edicon, who had left him for the time. At length, however, he re-appeared, and, sitting down beside the youth, addressed him kindly.

'The king,' he said, 'has asked for you. The fierce cloud of strife has passed away from his heart, and the sun will shine upon those that approach him now. Let us draw near. Lo! yonder he stands, where you see the crowd upon that high knoll. The warriors are going to bring their booty before him. If thou hast any boon to ask at his hands, ask it now.'

Theodore rose, and followed on foot, though there was a fevered weariness in his blood, a confused giddiness in his brain, which prevented him from clearly comprehending, or, indeed, from taking any interest in the words that were addressed to him. Even when he had approached the presence of him on whom his whole fate now depended, the objects passed before him as if in some unreal pageant, wherein he had no feelings engaged, and by which curiosity and admiration were hardly excited.

There sat Attila on horseback, and beside him a taller and a younger chieftain, with keen sharp eyes, and a low fierce brow. In his countenance there might be more of cunning, but there was less of power and intellect than in that of Attila; and, as Edicon caught the eye of the young stranger wandering over his form, he whispered, 'That is Bleda, the brother of the King.'

Theodore paused, where his companion paused, at no great distance from the spot

where the two leaders stood, and looked on, while the whole host passed in long line before the kings and their immediate followers, casting down in a pile all the rich and costly plunder which had been acquired in the first capture of a Roman city. How often, in the course of the succeeding months, was that scene to be repeated! There were the chased and jewelled cups and chalices which had graced the merry banquet, and poured the libation of hope or gratitude; there the sacred vessels of the church; there the gems and ornaments torn from the neck of beauty, and from the violated limbs of the tender, the gentle, and the beloved. There was poured out the miser's long accumulated store; there the early gift of young affection; there the inestimable product of ancient art; there the shining mass, only prized for its intrinsic value. Each object there cast down recorded some deed of profanation, either of sacred civil order, or of holy piety, or of the sweet sanctity of calm domestic life: each spoke trumpet-tongued against the horrid, the desolating, trade of war; the honoured, lauded, and rewarded curse, parent of murder, violence, and wrong.

Theodore scarcely remarked the division of the spoil, though he perceived that no voice, no, not even that of Bleda, was raised against the stern but just allotment made by Attila. Each soldier received his share; and each seemed to hear with reverence the words of his leader, and to gaze with awe upon the countenance of him whose steps seemed destined to crush thrones into the dust, and on whose breath hung the fate of nations and of empires.

When the division was over, Attila turned his eyes upon Theodore. 'Bid the Roman approach,' he said; and the youth advanced to the spot where he sat on the same horse which had borne him through the sacking of the city. His countenance, however, was now mild and calm; and the tone in which he addressed to Theodore some simple words of greeting was kind and father-like. Bleda said nothing; but he rolled his fierce eyes over the form of the young stranger, and his whole countenance spoke the unmitigated hate which he felt towards everything that bore the Roman name.

Theodore listened to the words of the monarch calmly; and then at once replied, 'Oh king! I have a boon to ask at thy hands; I beseech thee grant it unto me.'

'Speak,' said Attila, in the tongue of the Alani; but Bleda muttered, in the same language, 'Dash his brains out with an axe! that were the best boon to give him.'

Attila's brow darkened; but, without noticing farther than by that heavy frown his brother's words, he bade the youth proceed.

'Thou art mighty, oh king!' said Theodore, 'alas! too mighty; and, it may be, that, ere thou receivest defeat from the Roman arms (Attila smiled), many such a city as this that thou hast to-day destroyed may fall before thee——'

'Many shall fall!' interrupted Attila: 'I will tread upon their towers from Margus to Byzantium. I will mow the land as with a scythe: I will shake the armies from before my path, as a lion shakes off the morning dew from his mane. The fortified cities will I lay low, and the open villages I will burn, and my horses shall eat up the grass of the whole land. There shall be no green thing, and no beautiful thing, and no living thing, left throughout the country, unless speedy compensation for the wrongs done to me and to my people avert the wrath, and turn away the storm:—but yet, what wouldst thou?'

'This, oh king!' replied Theodore; 'my eye cannot witness the desolation of my native land. Either my heart will cease to beat, or my brain will turn, if I behold more of such scenes as those which I have this day witnessed. I am thine to do with as thou pleasest, and I will keep the promise I have made; but I do beseech thee, send me afar from such sights. Let me go into thine own country; and I swear by all that I hold sacred to remain there tranquilly till thou returnest.'

'I know not how that may be,' replied the king: 'thy life is dear to me, youth; and were a Roman now to show himself in the land of the Huns, without protection and support, except, indeed, as a captive, the stream of his days would soon fall into the great gulf of death.'

'If thou takest me on,' cried Theodore, 'to witness the murder of my fellow countrymen, the ruin and devastation of my native land, thou slayest me by a worse death than any thy people can inflict.'

'Well, thou shalt go back,' replied Attila; 'but I will send people with thee, to protect thee in my name, till thou art known and in safety in the land. I cannot spare thee Edicon; but he shall choose others who can speak some of the languages thou knowest: ours thou wilt soon learn. Follow me, until this night be over: to-morrow thou shalt depart. See to his repose, Edicon, and find him wherewithal to cover him from the night air. These Romans are not, as we are, familiar with the elements.

Edicon smiled; and Theodore felt the scorn which had fallen upon his nation; but he replied not, for the reproach was too true; and, retiring from the presence of Attila, he felt his heart relieved at the certainty of being no longer forced to contemplate with his own eyes all the horrors that awaited his native land.

In their eager and fiery course towards the destruction of the Roman empire, the Huns knew no pause, lingered for no repose. Ere noon, Viminacium was a heap of ashes; ere two hours more had passed, the division of their plunder had taken place; and ere another had gone by, the unwearied myriads were again upon their way, to repeat the same scenes of slaughter and destruction. At nightfall they halted. The innumerable small wagons, which followed them with a celerity quite marvellous, formed at once the ramparts of their principal camp, and the abode of such as were affected by some touch of softer manners. In the centre of the camp was raised the standard of the king, the rude black eagle crowned;* and round it, at the distance of about a hundred cubits, was drawn an inner circle of wagons; but in the clear and starry nights of summer no tent or awning covered the head of Attila; and beneath that victorious banner, which he carried unchecked from Caucasus to Gaul, he lay stretched upon the hide of a wild bull, which his own hand had slain.

Round about the great camp were a number of smaller enclosures; some appropriated to different tribes and nations, who followed the multitude of the Huns in their career of victory and pillage; some assigned to various friends and officers of the great monarch himself. Nevertheless, the warrior horsemen of that innumerable host did not confine themselves, where they feared no attack, to the circle of their encampment; but, spreading over the plain around, spent the early hours of the night in feasting and revelry.

Theodore, with Edicon, who showed for him on all occasions kindness and consideration, which was little to be expected from one of so barbarous a race, followed full half an hour behind the general march of the army, in order to avoid those sights of occasional violence and cruelty which were sure to take place, even in the thinly peopled part of the country which they now traversed. When they reached the spot, therefore, on which Attila had fixed for his encampment, night had already fallen; and for several miles around were to be seen blazing up a countless number of fires, with scarcely fifty yards from the one to the other, and with a circle of those wild soldiers surrounding and carousing about each. Little was the attention which they paid to the new-comers, as they rode through the midst of them; and Edicon, by frequently stopping to speak to those he knew, gave his companion a full insight into the habits of that roving people. We must not pause thereon, for this is not intended for a book of description; and yet it was a wild, strange scene that he beheld, full of matter for disgust and sorrow, and yet not without interest either. There all the vices of a savage state were displayed; while some peculiar virtues, and some of those strong enthusiasms, which, though not virtues, find chords of sympathy in every noble heart, broke forth from time to time, and shed a lustre over the mingled whole.

At some of the fires, reclining or sitting in grotesque or picturesque attitudes, lay groups of the wild Scythians, in their strange but striking dresses, drinking deep of various liquors, which they had either compounded or plundered; and, in the eyes of many, the fiery gleam of intemperance was already shining, while with hoarse laughter and savage gesticulation, they detailed the deeds of the day, or mocked the agonies of their victims. Round other fires, again, gaming with the same eagerness, the same loud words and fierce anxieties, so often to be found disgracing the capitals of civilised lands, might be observed other bodies of barbarians moved by another class of passions. Then, again, farther on, gazing with eager eyes, or listening with acute ears, and answering with bursts of thoughtless merriment, sat other bodies of the Huns, around some buffoon or jester,* in whose tale, or whose joke, or whose antic contortions, their whole thoughts seemed to be engaged, forgetful of the bloody yesterday, unmindful of the bloody morrow. Farther, still, rose up the voice of song; and, in notes not unmelodious, some native minstrel sung of love and war; praised the beauties of some honoured fair, or extolled the valour of some mighty chief. There, too, around him might be seen the dark countenances of those swarthy children of the north, moved by all the deep emotions which his song touched through the fine chords of association. There the youth leaned back; and, as he listened to the name of love, or heard the glowing words which painted some fair creation of the singer's mind, memory turned towards his native home, affection held up before his eyes the image of the one beloved, and his heart beat with eager palpitations as the gentler and the sweeter thoughts poured into his rude breast. There, too, might be seen the elder and the sterner soldier, who, when the song took up the tale of war, and told of things achieved by glorious courage, lands conquered, thrones acquired, and everlasting glory won, would half start from his grassy bed, and, resting on his arm, gaze with flashing eyes, and stirred up enthusiasms, upon the singer, and with

* It was called Astur, and is supposed to have been the same as the tributary bird of the Tartars named the Schongar.

* We find from all records that the Huns were peculiarly fond of gaming and of buffoons.

fond anticipations of the future, promise his own heart the glorious meed of deeds recorded in a song like that. Oh, beautiful, universal nature! noble feelings! touching harmonies of the musical heart of man! why, why, amongst you must be thrown so many discords to bring out your sweetness? Why can we not have on earth the perfect harmony? where, from the lowest to the highest, from the most solemn to the gayest note, all may find place, and rise in one grand, all-comprising anthem to the God of all?'

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE PERIL AND ESCAPE.

It was to one of those detached circles, which we have described as separated from the general encampment, that Edicon led the way, after speaking with several of the chiefs, as they passed along. It had been apparently reserved for himself and those who followed him, for the enclosure was nearly vacant, except where before the entrance of a tall but curiously-formed tent, which had probably been taken in war from some eastern nation, blazed up a large and cheerful fire. Around were seated about a dozen of the Huns, not less wild and fierce in the expression of their faces than the rest of their nation; and yet there was something about their dress and general appearance which struck Theodore as more familiar to his eye. As he approached, one of them rose and addressed him in the Latin language, and welcomed him to his tent with great purity of speech and accent; and oh, how sweet and musical did those sounds appear, after the strange harsh tongues which had lately rung in his ear, amidst scenes of ruin, bloodshed, and strife!

Sweet, sweet, indeed, it was, but overpowering. He felt the tears ready to gush from his eyes: a word would have made them overflow; and, without speaking, he entered the tent to which the man had pointed. It contained nothing in the outer chamber of the two into which it was divided by a curtain but a lighted lamp upon a small table; and in the inner a bed, piled up of skins, with a single wooden settle. It had an air, however, of civilisation and comfort; and how often is it in this life that the air has more influence upon our happiness than even the reality? We are the slaves of association; and, as such, truly but children of a larger growth, to whom the paint and tinsel of appearances render the toy valuable, whatever be its intrinsic worth.

Theodore cared little for the comfort, and thought Roman civilisation had fallen into effeminacy, and yet the sight of that tent, like the sound of Roman words, sent a thrill through his heart, and made him happier. Edicon saw his emotion, and seemed to understand its cause, at least in part.

'You are surprised,' he said, 'to hear the Latin tongue; but you will be more so to know that there are several thousands in our host who can use it fluently.'

'I have heard,' replied Theodore, 'when I was in Rome, that Ætius, the great general in Gaul, had several bodies of Huns amongst his mercenaries.'*

'Ay, and Valentinian also,' rejoined Edicon. 'Not two years since full ten thousand of our nation were engaged in defence of the Western Empire. We are too near neighbours to the East to have such friendly commerce with her. Besides, Theodosius is unworthy the defence of brave men, a mere weak coward, a flimsy knave, whose only means of proving his manhood is by murdering with hired steel the only honest and noble men left to save his empire.'

Edicon struck the chord aright; and Theodore's heart replied, though his lips were silent. 'These men,' continued the Hunnish chief, pointing to the barbarians, who were again seated round the fire, and took but little notice either of Theodore or their newly-arrived companions, who had followed him with Edicon—'These men have been chosen by the king himself, not because they speak thy language better than others in the camp, but because they are known as faithful and just. They will accompany thee back into our land, and though they go with regret, thou wilt find them true and trustworthy. Ten more will be added, whom thou mayest choose, either from amongst the Huns, who have lived with the Romans, or from amongst thy kinsmen the Alani.'

'I will choose the Alani,' answered Theodore quickly, and he observed, as he spoke, the brow of his companion contract, as if he were offended—'I will choose the Alani—not, noble Edicon,' he added, 'that I doubt or distrust the Huns, for to me they have been merciful, kind, and generous, whatever violence and cruelty they may have shown in dealing with my native land. But remember, that those I love the best have gone to seek a refuge with the Alan tribes; and perchance, by having some of them near me, I may learn,

* Not only was such the case, but in various contentions in the empire, hired bodies of the Huns were frequently found fighting on both sides, and doing their duty faithfully.

as I go, tidings which will cheer and console me to hear.'

'Not only as you go,' answered Edicon with a smile, 'but afterwards also; for those who are now chosen to accompany you are not only directed to be your guard by the way, but are also given you—not as servants to a lord, but as followers to a leader, and will obey you in all things, as far as our customs permit, so long as you remain with us.'

'It is strange,' answered Theodore thoughtfully; 'your king, so harsh and fierce towards others, is so gentle and merciful to me—considers my wants, provides for my security, and cares for my comfort as if he were a father.'

'Receive it all with gratitude,' replied Edicon, 'and he may prove a father to you. Nor must you think Attila harsh and fierce towards any, except in the hour of battle, when the spirit of war is upon him, and with the powers of a god he claims the attribute of vengeance. No! Though grave and stern, he is just and humane towards his people. Determined in his purposes, inflexible in his judgments, his purposes towards those who obey him are mild, his judgments even against himself are equitable. It is only the traitor amongst his own people, the aggressor amongst foreign nations, that he treats with rigour.'

'Think me not ungrateful,' said Theodore; 'I meant not to accuse thy monarch; and while I felt thankful for the tenderness he hath shown to me and mine—thankful for life and liberty preserved, and for the safety of those who are dearer to me than life itself—I have been forced to marvel that he has dealt so different a measure to me and to others. There is something strange in it.'

'There may be so,' replied Edicon; 'but think you there are no such things as sudden intimations, given us from heaven, of those with whom our fate is to be linked for good or evil? Think you that those prepossessions for or against, which we feel so suddenly, so unaccountably, in rare and extraordinary cases, are mere fancies, passing whims, which have no reference to after events?'

Theodore made no reply, for he remembered well his own peculiar feelings when he had first seen that powerful monarch with whom his own destiny had since been so completely mingled. He remembered it well, but he answered not, for the Hun seemed to have seen his feelings, or at least divined them; and at length Edicon went on. 'Such may have been the prepossession of Attila towards you; and we know, or at least believe, that the feelings I have mentioned are given us by the gods to let us know our friends and enemies. Does not the horse tremble when the unseen lion is near? Do not the bleatings of the sheep warn the shepherd to watch even while the wolf is yet afar off?'

He paused a moment for reply, and then added, 'But I will leave you to repose, and yet, ere you seek sleep, take some food, for your eyes are haggard and hollow, your cheek burning as if this tent were a furnace, and you have neither drunk mead nor broken bread during the whole day. Bid a slave bring food,' he continued, speaking to those without; and then, taking from one of his own followers the sword which Theodore had left in his hands, he laid it down on the small table by the lamp, saying, 'You are now turning to another land. Keep your weapon, for whether you need it or not, it is always well to be prepared. Add to it a javelin and a bow, for as you go through our country you may strike a stag or a wild bull, and gain honours in the chase, which we hold next to war. I will now leave you, and see you to-morrow ere you depart.'

Thus saying, his conductor left him, and a frightful negro slave, precious in the eyes of the Huns from the hideousness of his face and figure, brought him cooked meat and thin cakes of flour, with a strong drink composed of honey. Theodore tried to eat, but only few were the mouthfuls he could swallow, though the meat was not unsavoury. He tried, too, to drink; but there was a burning heat in his throat and mouth, and the sweet liquor was revolting to his taste.

'I will bring wine,' said the negro slave in tolerable Greek; 'I am a present from Attila the king to his Roman son, and he is to be henceforth my lord. Wilt thou have wine? for it shall go hard but with mine own wit and Attila's name to bear me out, I will find you as pure wine in the Hunnish camp as ever you tasted in the city of Constantine.'

'I would rather have pure water,' answered Theodore; 'I have a painful thirst upon me, and heart and tongue feel burning as if with fire.'

The slave sprang away, and returned in a few moments with both water and wine, and mingling them together, Theodore drank with delight which he had not known for long.

'I thank thee, friend,' he said, giving his hand to the slave in gratitude for the blessed draught; 'it is exquisite, and I thank thee.'

The slave took his hand and kissed it, gazing intently on his face; and then, seeing by the calm and grateful sincerity of the young Roman's look, that no scorn existed in his bosom towards that deformed and frightful shape which crouched at his feet, he sprang up saying, 'I have deceived you, but I will not betray you. I am not sent by Attila, but

by Bleda, his brother. Beware of him! Roman, beware of him!'

'I have no cause to fear him,' answered Theodore; 'I have done nought to injure him.'

The slave shook his head mournfully. 'Are we only injured by those whom we have injured?' he demanded. 'Alas! were it so, I should not be what I am. But I must speed hence, and not talk with thee too long, lest he hear that I have done so, and think I have betrayed him.'

'But tell me what is thy name?' demanded Theodore. 'I have nought to give thee as a reward, but some day, perchance, I may have, and I will not fail.'

'My name is Zercon,' answered the slave; 'and I am the crooked and mutilated jester of Bleda, the brother of Attila. Thou hast looked upon me with eyes of feeling and compassion, and I am rewarded enough; but I will serve thee farther still.'

Thus saying, he quitted the tent, and drew the external curtain closely after him. Theodore paused to think over what he had heard; but as he reflected, he could find in all the wide range of probability no cause why Bleda should seek to injure him. 'There must be some mistake,' he thought; and, overpowered with weariness and exhaustion, he laid his sword close beside the bed of skins, and casting himself down, endeavoured to forget his cares in slumber. Restless, unhappy, fevered, long and painfully he tossed upon that lowly couch, courting in vain the blessed influence which opens for us, for a while, those gates of care, that shut us in the dreary prison of ourself. The faintly burning lamp stood beside him, and by its pale light, as his eye roved round, the dark hangings of the tent became peopled with the spectres of imagination. His father passed before him, as he last had seen him at Byzantium, but his garments were spotted and dabbled with blood, and his countenance was pale with the ashy hue of death. Then came Flavia with a crown upon her head, and a shroud about her person. Then he beheld Eudochia struggling in the arms of a fierce and eager form, and then Ildica glided across the scene, clothed in bridal robes, and with her left hand clasped in that of a wild shadowy shape, which led her slowly forward, while in her right she carried a naked dagger, dropping as she went large gouts of crimson blood.

He knew, he felt, that it was all delusion, but yet he could not banish the swarming fancies that disturbed his brain, and even deceived the organ of sight itself. He closed his eyes, and resolutely turned his face to the wall of the tent near which he lay, and employed himself in listening to the various sounds which rose up from the myriads spread over that wide plain. Although there were some noises, which might be distinguished from the rest, an occasional burst of laughter, the loud and measured tones of some singer or reciter, or the wild notes of various rude instruments of music, yet the general buzz of all the many voices far and near came upon his ear with a drowsy and lulling hum, which gradually brought on an inclination to sleep. As time passed, too, the louder and more distinct sounds died away, and the whole subsided into a low and whispering rustle, which was like the noise of the sea upon a pebbly shore, only that it wanted the regular intermission of the successive waves. Forgetfulness fell upon him; but in a moment he woke up again with a quick start, gazed round to see where he was, felt the load of care pressed back upon memory, and hastened again to close his eyes, and cast it off once more.

He slept again, and this time more profoundly than the last, though his breathing was short and thick, and his limbs tossed to and fro. The lamp burned more and more dimly. The sounds in the camp fell into silence, only broken now and then by the wild neighing of a war-horse.

At length, a little before midnight, the curtain, which separated the tent into two chambers, and which he had let drop when he lay down to rest, trembled as with a slight wind —was slowly moved—was drawn back; and a tall, powerful form took a step within, and let it quietly fall again. Two more paces brought him to the side of the couch, where the young Roman lay, and with arms folded on his chest, the giant-like intruder gazed upon the sleeping youth, and then looked cautiously round the tent. When he had done so twice, he blew out the lamp, and drawing over his tall form the mantle which Theodore had cast off, he crouched himself down at the foot of his bed. All was still and silent, but the quick, heavy breathing of the Roman youth, and the rustling of his clothes, as he turned from time to time upon his uneasy couch. In less than half-an-hour, however, the curtain again moved, and a listening head was advanced within it.

'The lamp has gone out,' said a whispering voice, speaking to some one in the outer chamber, in the lowest tone that the human tongue can assume: 'lift up the curtain of the door, lest I miss my blow.'

The curtain was lifted up, the inner one pushed back, and in streamed the pale, calm moonlight, showing Bleda, the brother of Attila, partly advanced within the inner chamber. He took another step forward, and listened, grasping tight the shining blade, which he carried in his hand. Another step brought him within arm's length of the Roman's couch, and his hand was raised to

strike, when, bounding like a lion on its prey, up started from his master's feet Cremera, the Arab freedman, and seized the murderer in his gigantic grasp.

An instant struggle took place; but the Hun was no match for his antagonist, who cast him down upon the ground, shaken, and nearly stunned. Another barbarian, however, rushed in sword in hand from the outer tent; but Theodore was now upon his feet, and springing across the prostrate body of Bleda, interposed between the armed Hun and his gallant freedman. Another barbarian appeared at the door of the tent, and how the struggle might have gone, who shall say? but then, there came a cry of 'Attila the king! Attila the king!' and with a torch before him, the dark monarch of the Huns advanced slowly into the tent. He gazed round upon the faces of all present, with that stern, calm, unmoved look, which never changed but in the fury of the battle.

Bleda, who had risen, answered his brother's glance with a look of fierce and fiery impatience, and planted his foot upon his sword, which had fallen from his hand in the struggle, as if he feared that some one should snatch it up. The companion who had followed him, with his naked blade still in his hand, stood trembling before the face of Attila, with a pale and changing countenance.

To Bleda the great monarch said nothing; but slowly drawing his heavy sword from the sheath, he raised it over his head, and at a single blow cleft through the skull of his brother's follower, till the trenchant blade stopped at his teeth and jaws.

Bleda sprang forward with wrath flaming from his eyes. 'How darest thou,' he cried, 'slay my servant?'

'How darest thou,' said Attila, in a voice of thunder, 'lift thy hand against my friend? Thinkest thou that Attila can be deceived? Thinkest thou that Attila will not punish? Bleda, Bleda! Once, twice, thrice, have I warned thee! The measure is full! See that it run not over. I am neither blind to thine ambition nor thy purposes. Beware while it is yet time, and be yet my brother.'

'Why, what have I to fear from thee,' demanded Bleda, haughtily; 'am I not a king as thou art? Did not the same father beget us, the same mother bear us? Was not the dominion left to us equally divided? What art thou, that thou shouldest judge me? Am I not a king as thou art?'

'Our portion was once equal,' answered Attila; 'but though I have not robbed thee of one tribe, or of one charger, what are my dominions now and thine? I have added nation unto nation, and kingdom unto kingdom, whilst thou hast held thine own only beneath the protection of thy brother's shield. Bleda, I have trod upon the necks of fifteen kings, each greater than thou art. Force me not to tread upon thine. Once more, beware! I tell thee, the cup is full! Thou knowest Attila; now get thee gone, and leave me.'

Bleda paused a moment, as if he would fain have given voice to the rage that swelled within his heart. But there was a strange and overwhelming power in his brother's presence, which even he, who had struggled with him from infancy up to manhood, could not resist. He remained silent then, not finding words to answer, and taking up his sword, he shook it with a bent brow at Cremera, and quitted the tent.

'Take away yon carrion, and give it to the vultures,' said Attila, pointing to the body of him he had slain.—'Brave man,' he continued, turning to Cremera, 'well hast thou done what I gave thee in charge—thou hast saved thy master's life; now leave us, but wait with the men without, to whom I gave the task of guarding him from evil. Bid them be more cautious for the future, and tell them, that the presence of the king's brother—nay, of his son himself—can never more be an excuse to Attila for failing in obedience unto him. For the present, they are pardoned; get ye gone.'

Cremera retired; and Attila, motioning his own attendants to withdraw, made them drop the curtain of the tent, and then sat down upon the couch of skins. Theodore stood for a moment by his side, but the king made him be seated, calling him by the gentle name of 'my son.'

'Thou art surprised,' he said, 'to see thy faithful freedman here amongst us; but when I found thee first, sleeping in the watch-tower beyond the Danube, he sat between thee and me with his spear in his hand, glaring upon me as I have seen in Eastern lands the lioness glare upon the hunters, who would take her young; and I said to mine own heart, 'If this youth should ever want a faithful guard, here is one who would spill his own heart's blood, rather than a drop of his lord's should flow.' When I followed thee from Margus, too, I found him almost alone, struggling with some of my warriors who had gone on before, in defence of the women, for whom, as well as for thyself, I had promised thine uncle my protection. He would not yield till a heavy blow on the head had stunned him, but I gave him in charge to those who are skilled in the secret virtues of herbs and flowers, with commands to bring him after me, and to cure him. They promised me he should be soon well; and when I heard of thy danger, and that he had recovered, I sent him hither to guard thee, till I could come myself, not choosing to oppose any of my own nation to the hand of my brother; and I knew that that

brother would do the deed he meditated with his own arm.'

'Then I have once more to thank thee, mighty Attila, for life,' said Theodore; 'to thank thee, the enemy of my native land, the destroyer of my countrymen.'

'Not so,' replied the monarch: 'I have once saved thy life, I grant, when thou wert in the power of Arderic; but for the deed of to-night thou owest me nothing. I promised thee protection, and had I not given it when I could, I should have been myself thy murderer. But to-morrow thou seekest to depart and leave me. Is it not so?'

'It is,' answered Theodore; 'not that I am ungrateful for thy favours, oh king! nor insensible to the distinction which thou makest between me and others of my race; but the scenes I have witnessed, the grief and bitterness of heart that I have endured, since the morning sun of yesterday, would soon terminate my existence, were they often to be renewed. Did your nation wage warfare like a civilised people, I might endure, though I might grieve; but now the sight of the utter extermination and devastation which thy tribes inflict wherever they pass is death, is worse than death to me likewise.'

Attila fixed his eyes upon the ground, and remained for a moment silent. 'I will reason with thee, my son,' he said at length; 'for, though I disdain the art of the idle and subtle fools, who wrangle, as I hear, for an empty word in the schools of thy capital, yet Attila is not without reasons for anything he does, and when needful, can give those reasons, if it so please him. Thou talkest of the hostilities of civilised nations, and speakest with anger and fear of our more just and reasonable dealings in our warfare. But we make war upon our enemies, not upon our friends. We either go to subdue and bring under our dominion other nations, or to avenge ourselves upon a foreign foe. If the first be our object, and resistance is offered to us, how foolish to leave our enemies the means of resisting us with success! how weak to spare men who have done all they could to slay us, or women and children, by which the race of our adversaries may be kept up and increased? No; it behoves us to smite with the arrow and the sword, so long as there is any power of resistance in the land, and never sheathe the blade, or unstring the bow, till we are undisputed masters of the whole race and region. Then again, if we go for vengeance, what vengeance do we gain by suffering our own warriors to be slain without slaying our enemies? The more that die, the more is vengeance satisfied, and if we purchase it with our own blood, we must drink the blood of our enemies. What you call civilised warfare is a mere folly, which protracts the attainment of the end it seeks, and often loses it altogether—which, instead of blazing like a bright fire, and consuming rapidly a small quantity of fuel, lingers long, and burns a thousand-fold as much. No, no, my son, the most merciful warfare is that which is the shortest; and that in which no compassion is shown or asked, is always sure to be the soonest over. Nevertheless,' continued Attila, 'I seek not to make thee witness the ruin of thy native land, though, methinks, the destruction of thy father's murderer might well repay the sight; but thou shalt go hence. The men I have chosen to accompany thee are under thy command, and thou shalt have cattle, and woods, and pasturage assigned thee from my own herds and lands; ay, even gold shalt thou have, and, what is better, security and peace; for whosoever lifts his hand against thee shall have Attila for his foe; and now fare thee well, till we meet again on my return.'

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE COUNTRY OF THE HUNS.

THEODORE was left alone once more, and weariness was more than ever upon him; but yet the busy untiring course of thought went on for long after he had again laid down to rest. Thought's insidious enemy, sleep, at length crept upon him; but ere calm forgetfulness had complete dominion, Cremera once more stole into the tent, and again lay down at his feet. The lamp, however, had been lighted by the followers of the monarch; and Theodore, recognising the form of his faithful attendant, merely spoke a few words of thanks and greeting, and let his heavy eyelids fall.

Broad daylight was shining through the chinks of the tent when he awoke; and Cremera was sitting in the outer chamber, polishing with a knife a strong ashen staff, to which he had fitted the iron head of a spear. Theodore saw that the day must be far advanced, and rising, he offered prayers and thanks to God; and then, while speaking many kindly words to the freedman, he advanced and pushed back the loose hangings that closed the interior of the tent from the view of the outer world.

How changed was the scene which met his eye, from that which he had passed through on the preceding night! The Huns were gone; scarcely a vestige of them remained; not a wagon, not a group was to be seen over all that wide plain, except where, before the door of the tent, ten or twelve of the Huns,

and an equal number of the Alani, taller, stronger, and fairer to look upon than their dark companions, employed the vacant hours in packing a number of small and strangely assorted articles into two of the low wagons, which had formed part of the night's circle round the tent. The sun was not very far from its meridian, and Theodore saw that he must have slept long and profoundly, but yet he was not refreshed. There was a weariness, a heaviness upon his limbs that he had never felt before, a burning heat upon his skin, that the cooler climate, in which he now was placed, could not have produced.

Nevertheless, he gladly prepared to depart, and bade the attendants, who had been assigned to him, make all things ready, while he went to bathe his feverish body in a small stream that his eye caught glistening on, at a short distance, upon its way to join the rushing waters of the Danube. The cool wave, however, proved no refreshment, and only caused a chilly shudder to pass over his limbs, succeeded quickly by the same heat as before. On his return, he found food prepared, but he could not eat ; and though his lips loathed the wine they offered, he drank a deep draught from the horn of a urus, for the sake of gaining that temporary strength of which he felt himself to stand in need.

His own horse, fresh as the early morning, from a night of repose, stood near, but the horses of the barbarians were still straying over the plain. A shrill long whistle, however, brought them in a moment to their master's sides, and small grooming did the rude riders of the Dacian wilds bestow upon their swift but rugged beasts. The tent was by this time struck, and placed upon the wagons ; and Theodore, with one of the Huns beside him to guide him as he went, led the way onward, towards that strange land, which seemed thenceforward destined to be his home for many a long year. Of his guide he asked various questions, and was answered fluently in his own language ; but at length Cremera, who followed, pointed towards the towers of a far distant city, saying, 'Is not that Margus?'

'It is,' answered the Hun. 'We can go thither if thou wilt,' he continued, addressing Theodore. 'We can repose there to-morrow night. It is now a city belonging to Attila the king.'

'No, no,' replied Theodore, with many a painful feeling at the very thought finding expression on his countenance—'No, no, not in the city for a thousand worlds ; rather let us lodge in the open field.'

'Thou art wise, young chief,' replied the Hun. 'Cities are hateful places : Attila loves them not, any more than thou dost ; and though Margus is his, he will not keep it long, but will either sell it back to the Romans or destroy it.'

Theodore replied not ; and they rode on, till at length towards even-tide they came near the banks of the Danube, and after half an hour's riding within sight of the river, halted for the night on a spot near the old Roman way from Mœsia into Dacia. Theodore was fatigued, but yet he could not rest ; and while they were engaged in setting up his tent, he wandered forward to drink of the great river.

It was a sweet, bright, tranquil afternoon. The sun was just dipping beneath the wood-covered hills, upon the opposite bank of the river, but the air was still full of his light ; and the forests and mountains, the soft green slopes, the blue sky, and the light passing cloud, were mirrored in the swift waters of the mighty stream, as it flowed on towards the ocean. The air, too, was calm ; and silence hung above the world, except when the laughing note of the woodpecker, or the melody of the thrush, broke the silence for a moment, to render it more calm and sweet. Theodore gazed up the stream, and beheld afar gigantic masses of masonry, rifted and broken, projecting from either bank, while here and there, from the broad sea-like bosom of the Danube, rose up massy piers and wood-work, the fragments of some vast fabric swept away.

It was evidently the famous bridge of Trajan that stood before him, just as the destroying hand of his envious successor had left it ; and as Theodore gazed upon the remnants of that stupendous work, as they stood in the clear light and shade of evening, he could not but meditate upon the change of dynasties, the vanity of human hopes, the fruitlessness of earthly endeavours, and all the many and melancholy themes on which poet and philosopher have sung and moralised, hoping, even while they did so, for that earthly immortality which they knew and proved to be a bubble. There before his eyes stood one of the greatest works of one of the greatest men that the human race in all its vast succession of beings, in all its complexity of characters, in all its variety of qualities, has ever produced, from the creation till to-day ; and yet a mean follower, unable to compete with him in intellect, in feeling, in effort, or in success, had possessed the power to sweep away from off the earth that majestic monument of a grand and creative mind, to cast down what the good and wise had raised up, to destroy what the noble and energetic had created.

'Oh wonderful frailty of man's most lasting works!' thought the young Roman ; 'that nothing can give them certain existence, no, not for a century. That which the earthquake spares, the hand of war and violence pulls

down; that which hostile armies have respected, the mean envy of inferior genius will destroy. Alas! when we look around, and think of the work of but a few short lustres upon man's noblest efforts, and his brightest productions, well, well may we ask, What is lasting upon earth?'

He paused. 'Yes, yes!' he thought again; 'virtue is lasting! virtue is immortal, even here! Rarely as it is seen, often as it is counterfeited, shunning publicity, hating pomp, virtue, indestructible like gold, even in the fire of time, and amidst the trial of circumstances comes out pure, and passes on uninjured, accumulating slowly, but brightly, in the treasuries of the past, and forming an inexhaustible store of example and encouragement for all who choose to take it. Yes, yes, virtue *is* lasting! One may produce, and another may destroy; but Trajan shall be remembered, when Hadrian is forgotten or contemned.'

Theodore, as the confidence in some great principle of stability returned to his heart, set his foot more firmly upon the earth, which, to his imagination, had seemed crumbling beneath him like a pile of dust and ashes, while he had only remembered how brief, how transitory, is the existence of the noblest fabrics that it bears.

He would fain have gone on to examine more nearly the mighty fragments of what had once been the celebrated bridge of Trajan, but the ruins were further than they seemed; he was weary and languid, and ever and anon, urged by the burning thirst upon him, he paused to drink again of the waters of the Danube. At length he gave up his purpose and returned to the tent, where the Huns were broiling, on a wood fire, a large fish which they had caught in the neighbouring river. At the very sight of food a sickening disgust came over the young Roman; but his faithful Cremera pressed him so anxiously to eat, that he forced himself to swallow a few mouthfuls. But it was in vain; he could not go on, and soon retiring to his tent, he endeavoured to find repose.

No sounds disturbed his rest, for nothing was to be heard but the rushing of the Danube, and the sighing of the wind through the tall trees. No human being had been seen through all that morning's journey; no voice of salutation had welcomed them as they passed, showing too well how desolate the land had been made; and after the youth's attendants had laid themselves down to sleep, not a tone but one solitary scream from some flitting bird of night broke the silence of the world around: and yet Theodore courted slumber in vain. He tossed his weary limbs upon the couch of skins which had again become his bed, and counted the heavy minutes from night till morning. Frequently through all the violent heat that burned in his whole frame, a cold chilly shudder would pass over him, and he felt that the hand of sickness was upon him.

Nevertheless, he started up with the dawn, bent with feverish eagerness upon pursuing his journey as quickly as possible, while yet the last efforts of his remaining strength could be exerted to oppose the overpowering weight that pressed him down. Looking out from the tent, he saw the Huns and the Alani already busy in preparing for departure; and in a few minutes, one who seemed to have been despatched to seek for a means of transport, came back to say that the raft had already come down to the shore. Cremera gazed anxiously on the changed and ashy countenance of his lord; but he spoke not, and led the war-horse, who knew his hand better than that of any of the Huns, down to the bank of the river. A raft, such as had borne Theodore across once before, was waiting with some of the rude boatmen of the Danube, and in two voyages the whole party which accompanied the young Roman was born across and landed on the other side of the river.

Dacia was now before his steps; and although he could not but feel a chilly coldness at the thought that he had passed perhaps for ever the boundary of his native land, had left behind him, for an unlimited space of years, all those scenes and objects linked to the brightest memories of his heart, had entered upon a course where all was new and strange, where much was dark and doubtful, and much distinctly painful; and that he had nothing in prospect, at the very best, but a long, dull lapse of years, amongst nations inferior to his own in every point of intellect, and every art of social life; yet there was a feeling of joy broke across the gloom of such anticipations, when he remembered the sights of horror which he had just witnessed on the Roman frontier, and felt that he would be called to mingle in such scenes no more. The very feeling gave him new energy; the morning air seemed to revive him; and he spurred on with the rest through the wide forest that lay before their steps, and across which a grass-grown track afforded them a way into the interior of the country.

In less than three hours, at the rapid rate at which they travelled, they had crossed the belt of wood which for a considerable way bordered the Danube. Beyond that belt, stretched out a plain, which would have seemed interminable, had not the blue lines of some distant mountains, rising up against the far horizon, marked its boundary. Except where, here and there, was seen a line of forest ground, looking like a group of bushes, in the

vast extent over which the eye could stretch, the whole plain seemed covered with long green grass waving like a mighty lake, as a light wind bent it to and fro in the morning sunshine.

There was something grand and expansive in the view, notwithstanding its vast monotony; and as Theodore paused for a moment, and let his horse breathe upon the edge of the slight slope on which the forest ended, he gazed with some feelings of surprise and admiration upon the new world which was henceforth to be his habitation. That feeling again refreshed him; but much need had he indeed of refreshment, and of anything which could give even a momentary support to that strength which was failing fast under the pressure of fatigue and illness.

'Let your horse pause for a moment and eat,' said the Hun, who rode by his side. 'We are a long way from a resting-place; under those woods is our first village.'

Theodore did as the other advised, but his heart grew faint at such a notification of the length of way; for though he would not pause nor yield so long as any powers of life were left, yet he felt that the powers of life were waning, and that if he reached not soon some place, where he could obtain refreshment and repose, he should never reach it at all, but sink of unwonted weariness by the way.

In a few minutes they again began their journey through the plain, riding up to their horses' chests in the long rich grass, which, though it proved no obstacle to the small quick horses of the Huns, impeded and irritated at every step the fiery charger which had carried the young Roman. In the meanwhile the summer sun got high, and poured its burning rays upon Theodore's unsheltered head: a white, filmy, and oppressive mist rose up from the moist plain, not thick enough to impede the sight, but tinging every object with a peculiar hue. For a long time nothing diversified the scene; nothing interrupted the monotony of their progress; but at length an immense bird sprang up almost from under their horses' feet, and spreading its wings, without rising from the ground, ran on with extraordinary speed before them.

'An ostrich! an ostrich!' cried Cremera, forgetting the distance between the spot where he then stood and his own porphyry mountains; 'an ostrich! a young ostrich!'

But the Hun, who was by his side, paused for a moment without speaking, poised the javelin he carried in his hand, and launched it with a strong arm in the air. Falling with unerring aim, it struck the great bustard between the wings, and, riding on, the Hun took it up, and slung it over his shoulders, saying, 'This will secure our evening meal.'

Still they rode on, and more and more terrible grew the lassitude of the Roman youth: the heat was overpowering; the way seemed interminable, and that distant line of wood, towards which their steps were bent, though appearing certainly to grow larger, yet was approached so slowly, that Theodore, as he gazed upon it, felt his heart grow faint with the despair of ever arriving at the calm shelter which he vainly hoped there to find. With his lip parched, with his eye glazed, with his cheek pale yet burning, and with his hands scarcely able to hold the reins, still he rode on, looking forward with an anxious, straining gaze upon those woods, thinking they never would be reached. Wider and wider they stretched out before him. The plain on which he had seen them stand alone, like a group of bushes, when he had gazed on them from the distant heights, now seemed bounded by them entirely on that side. As he came nearer, he could distinguish the vast rolling masses of forest, the dark deep brakes, where glades or savannahs intervened, and at length, while with his dim and dizzy sight he scanned eagerly the scene before him, he thought he could perceive some low wooden cottages crouching as if for shelter beneath the wide-extended arms of the tall trees upon the edge. That sight again gave him a momentary impulse; he urged his horse on; he saw the cottages more distinctly; but, as with that last effort he attempted to reach them, strength, and hope, and thought, all gave way at once, and with just the consciousness of utter exhaustion, he fell fainting from his horse.

A lapse of time succeeded, over which Theodore's memory had no power. He had talked, he had suffered, he had raved, he had struggled during the interval, he had named names which those around him did not know, he had spoken a thousand things which they could not comprehend, while for fourteen days he had lain tossed between life and death, and tended by the hands of strangers. But of all that, he had no recollection, when at length reasoning consciousness had returned.

It was the evening of a sweet summer's day, when, opening his eyes, he looked around, and wondered where he was. There was a small chamber, lined with smooth and fragrant pine wood, from the cracks and crevices of which the fresh resin was yet oozing. On the walls hung, in fantastic garlands, many a barbarian instrument of war, spears and swords, the quiver of arrows and the unstrung bow, the buckler, the club, and the far-slaying sling. There, too, beneath, on stands and tables of wood, might be seen a number of strange idols, wild, unseemly shapes, such as a child might carve for sport out of a block of wood. Settles and tables were there, also, of the same plain

material, but on some of them appeared objects of a more valuable kind and a richer workmanship. There lay, even in abundance, gems and gold, bearing evident marks of cultivated taste and skilful art: but there were two things more sweet than any other could have been to Theodore's senses at that moment, which called all attention from every other object.

The first was the calm sweet breath of the summer evening, borne light and fragrant through the open window; the other was the sweet melodious voice of a woman singing.

He turned his eyes to where the singer sat, beside the bed on which he was stretched, and saw a girl of some seventeen years of age, with bright brown hair, worn not as Roman women wore it, but parted on the fair forehead, and thrust in clustering ringlets behind her ears. The face was very sweet and beautiful, and everything would have been soft—perhaps too soft for great interest—had it not been for the deep devoted blue eyes. They were somewhat darker in hue than the sky by day, but yet as they gazed forth from the long dark lashes they looked like that same azure heaven at the moment when its colour is most deep, yet most pure, just ere the curtain of the night falls over its expanse. She saw the youth turn his eyes upon her; but thinking only that sleep had fled again from his still fevered brain, she recommenced the song she had been singing, while her small white hands continued to ply the light labour of the distaff. Theodore, however, could now hear and understand: and he listened with delight that cannot be told, while in the Alan tongue, the language of his own dear mother, she sang with a sweet soft, rounded voice—

### THE SONG OF SLEEP.

Come, gentle sleep, to the couch of the stranger,
From thought's weary burden, oh give him relief!
Take mem'ries of anguish and prospects of danger,
The future's dull care, and the past's heavy grief!

Sweet friend of our childhood, thou strewest with flowers
The pillow where infancy rests her calm head,
When weary with sporting through long happy hours,
With thee for her angel, she seeks the soft bed.

Coy visitant, come! We prize thee more highly,
In years more mature when we've tried the world's truth;
Why com'st thou so rarely? why fly'st thou so shily?
Oh what thus estranges the friend of our youth?

We've been false to thy friendship, despised thy caresses,
For pleasures we've left thee, and even for cares:
The faithful, the tranquil, the humble, sleep blesses,
But flies from the couch that one wild passion shares.

Yet, balm-giver, yet, for the sick and the weary,
Thy merciful gifts we implore, as a boon;
Oh give us thine aid, on our way long and dreary—
Aid tardily valued, and lost all too soon!

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### NEVA.

It is a strange and awful sensation, when, after having enjoyed, to the full, the powers and energies of manhood, we find ourselves suddenly reduced by the unnerving hand of sickness to the feebleness of infancy: when giant strength lies prostrate, and busy activity is chained to the weary bed. It is strange, and it is awful, for it shows us most sensibly how frail a thing is that vigour which, in our boisterous days of health, we madly think an adamantine armour against all adversity. It is strange and awful; for it leads us to the brink of that precipice, over which all must fall, and displays, as if from the very verge, the inside of our future grave.

From a stupor, in which all memory and every power of thought had been at an end, Theodore woke as feeble and incapable as when, in the nurse's arms, he moved his mother's heart by his first infant cry. The same feelings of tenderness; the same mingled emotions, where pity and hope and the pleasure of protecting, all unite; the same sensations of affectionate interest for the thing we rear and guard and watch for, as those which fill the breast of a mother towards her child, affected, though in less degree, those who attended the couch of the young Roman during his illness and convalescence. It was but slowly he recovered: for the fever, which had seized upon him, had been fierce and powerful; and it had been only unfaded youth's tenacity of life, and the natural vigour of his frame, which had finally conquered that terrible assailant.

The persons who attended him were entirely women, except when his faithful Cremera took his daily turn to watch by his bedside; and though an elder and more matronly dame came in and out, and frequently remained in his chamber for an hour or more, still his principal attendant was the lovely girl whom he at first had seen, or a maiden who seemed to be her sister, still younger than herself.

Often would he keep his eyes closed, to listen, uninterrupted, to the sweet singing of the barbarian girl; often when he woke would he find that graceful form bending over him, and those deep intense blue eyes gazing upon his countenance, as if to mark the outposts of victorious health, spreading life's rosy banner, where the pale flag of sickness had been advanced so lately. As he recovered strength also, and his tongue became more capable of

its office, he would converse with her from time to time, in the language which she had used in singing; and though she spoke it not as her native dialect, yet they could thus converse fluently.

With the matron it was different: she was kind, but not conversable; yet when she did speak, it was always in the pure Alan tongue; and Theodore could almost have fancied that he heard once more the voice of his mother. Under kind care and skilful management he at length reached the point where his recovery became certain; and from that moment his convalescence proceeded rapidly. He was soon able to quit his chamber; and going forth, though with wavering and unsteady steps, he walked along, enjoying the fresh air of the morning, beneath the rude portico of unshaped stems of trees, which shaded one side of that long, low dwelling; while his heart was raised with fresh gratitude to heaven at every sweet sound and sight that he was permitted again to enjoy. There had been a time, not very long before, when life had seemed to him a weary burden, which he desired not to retain, the earth a dreary and a desert dwelling-place, in which he was but little anxious to remain. But such feelings had only existed while the body remained in strength and vigour, oppressed and impatient under a mind overcharged with sorrows, anxieties, and cares. Now, however, the corporeal frame had been weakened and cast down; the body as well as the mind had been humbled and chastised; the blessings of life were more valued, the past could be regarded with resignation, and the future looked forward to with hope.

As he walked forth one day under the shadow of that portico, his eye wandered over the whole plain, on which, at a little distance, appeared some horsemen, whom he afterwards found to be those who had attended him thither. In the shade, however, were collected a number of women, comprising all those whom he had hitherto seen; and Neva, the blue-eyed daughter of the house, smiled gaily to see his wavering steps. The next moment she greeted him with, 'Come, sit you with the women, till you have strength enough to join the men;' and she made room for him on the bench on which she sat, between herself and her mother.

All were employed in some domestic occupation; and the distaff, and the spindle, and the wheel went on, while Theodore, sitting beside them, began to ask the first questions, which he had hitherto ventured, regarding the place and the family in which he then was. He found that the village, which he saw stretching along under the forest, contained not less than two or three hundred wooden cottages; and his eyes at once showed him that the one in which he had found shelter, and received so much true kindness, was by far the most extensive and most ornamented of the whole. When he came to ask, however, whose was the house in which he dwelt, and whose the family that tended him so carefully, they answered him at once, that it was that of Bleda, the brother of Attila.

His countenance changed, and he asked no more questions. Ere he had sat long there the horsemen returned from the field, bringing with them some game which they had procured; and eagerly, and with signs of much regard, they gathered round Theodore, and wished him joy on his recovered health. Towards evening, two herdsmen drove home from a distance a large flock of diminutive cattle, and a shepherd brought some sheep into the fold. Two or three other lesser flocks were driven slowly across the plain to different houses in the village; but the men who drove them formed the only male population, with the exception of his own attendants, which Theodore had yet seen since he entered Dacia.

As the days passed on, and he mingled more with the people, he found that this first view was fully confirmed, and that almost all the men of the land, except such as were too old or too young to bear arms, had gone forth with Attila in his invasion of the Roman empire.

'Were Rome now,' thought Theodore, 'what Rome once was, while this barbarian monarch invades and ravages the East, the legions of the West would pour across Pannonia, and, sweeping the whole land, take as hostages the women and children here left unprotected. But, alas! I fear me, that neither the legions of the East will have power to withstand the myriads of Attila, nor the West have energy to hasten his return, by invading his territories, and taking hostages for his future tranquillity. 'Tis true they may not know that the land is left in such a state; but, alas! I must not point out its weakness. Even to save my country, I must not return the mercy shown me, and the kind hospitality received, by base ingratitude. Doubtless, when strength returns, I could escape; doubtless I could bear to Valentinian, or, better still, to Ætius, tidings of the condition in which this land is left, and thereby, perchance, deliver the empire itself. But it must not be! No, no! such a task must not be mine.'

The situation, however, was a painful one; and the knowledge, too, that he was dwelling in the house of Bleda, of the man who had striven to take his life, and whose enmity—though he knew not why—was evidently fiercely raised against him, added to the gloom he felt, and made him anxious to proceed farther into the country.

Ruga, the wife of Bleda, however, was herself one of the Alani, from a tribe which had remained amidst their original valleys on the Georgian side of Caucasus. She had by this time learned that the mother of the young stranger had been a daughter of the same nation, though sprung from a different tribe; and, little aware of the enmity of her husband towards him, she now pressed Theodore anxiously to stay with them till the armies of the Huns returned. Her daughter, too, urged the same request, with all the native simplicity of a guileless heart; and Theodore himself, as innocent in thought and purpose, believed that he could there remain happily, without risk or danger to the peace of any one, were it not for the enmity of Neva's father. He made inquiries, however, and he found that no chance existed of any of the Huns returning for several months; and he determined to remain for a time, hoping that if he could win the regard of the chieftain's family, the causeless animosity of Bleda himself might by their report be done away.

There, then, he stayed, increasing in the love of all, and habituating himself to the language, the sports, and the manners of the people. He had found, on his recovery, that the purse of gold pieces which he had borne with him from Dalmatia, and which had been but little diminished on the journey, had been carefully preserved during his sickness; and though the amount was not very large, yet the difference in the value of everything, amongst the Huns and amongst the Romans, was so great, that his small store seemed grown into an inexhaustible treasure. The attendants whom Attila had given him would receive no recompense for their services; and the sports of the chase, which he pursued in company with them and Cremera, afforded more than sufficient provision for his followers and for himself. Ruga declared that her house had never been so bountifully supplied, even when Bleda himself was present; and the simpler food, to which the women of the Huns were accustomed, received no slight additions from the hunter skill and bold activity of their guest.

For several weeks Theodore pursued this course in peace, proceeding to the woods or plains, or to the mountains, early in the morning with his followers, and returning ere nightfall to the village. To those followers, indeed, the young Roman endeared himself every day more and more. His courage, and the dexterity with which he acquired all their wild art in the chase and in the management of the horse, won their reverence; while his kindness, his gentleness, and his easy suavity, touched another chord, and gained their hearts. If stag, or wolf, or bear turned upon him, every one was ready to defend him; and Theodore soon found that on any enterprise which he chose to undertake, except, indeed, where some higher duty forbade, he might lead those men to danger, or to death itself. Nor did he make less progress in the regard of the villagers. The old men took a pleasure in teaching him their language, and in telling him wild tales of other days, and other lands; the children clung to him, and gathered round his knee; the shepherds brought him whatever they found in their wanderings, which seemed to their rude eyes either rare or valuable. To his cultivated opinion all questions were referred; and when they found that, ere two months were over, he could wield their arms, and speak their language, with as much facility as they could themselves, adding to their barbarian dexterity all the arts and knowledge of a civilised nation, they seemed to think him something more than mortal.

The wife of the chieftain forgot her matronly state, so far as to hold long conversations with him on the nation whose blood flowed in both their veins; and her fair daughter sprang forth with eager gladness to welcome him back from the chase, or if he went not thither, wandered with him in the mornings to show him fair paths through the wood, and teach him what fruits were hurtful, what beneficial to man, in those wild solitudes; or sat near him in the evenings, and, with her long lashes veiling her cast down blue eyes, sang all the songs which she knew he loved to hear.

It was those deep blue eyes, and their look of devoted tenderness, which first woke Theodore from his dream of peace. Neva was lovely, gentle, kind, noble in all her feelings, graceful in all her movements, frank, simple, and sincere. Pure in heart and mind, the elegancies of polished life seemed scarcely needful to her native grace. In whatever task employed, she looked, she acted, as—and no one could doubt she was—the daughter of a king: and yet Theodore's thoughts were seldom upon her. Sometimes, indeed, when he saw a flower of peculiar beauty, or when his arrows struck some bird of rare plumage, or some beast of a finer fur, he thought, 'I will take this home for Neva;' but his fancy never strayed amiss to warmer feelings or more dangerous themes than those.

Oh, no! his thoughts were far away! The one deep-rooted passion, strong and intense as life itself—that one bright passion, as pure, when it is noble, in man as in woman, as incapable of falsehood either by thought or act—left not one fond fancy free for any other than her, his first, young, early, only love. When the sun in floods of glory went down beyond the western hills, he thought of her lonely in that distant land, and willingly believed that with her, too, memory turned to him. When the

bright moon wandered through the sky, and poured her silver flood of light over those wide plains, he would gaze forth, and call to mind that first peculiar night when he heard the dear lips he loved breathe answering vows to his beneath the palace portico on the Dalmatian shore: he would call up again before his eyes the scene in all its loveliness; he would fancy he could feel that soft, dear form pressed gently to his bosom; he would seem to taste the breath of those sweet lips as they met his in the kiss of first acknowledged love; and he would imagine—justly, truly imagine—that at that hour the same treasured remembrances might fill the bosom of Ildica with visions as entrancing, and that memory might with her, too, give to hope a basis whereon to raise her brightest architecture. When the morning woke in the skies, and when, ere he went forth to taste the joys of renewed existence, he knelt down, to offer to the God of his pure faith adoration and thanks and prayer, the name of Ildica would first rise with his petitions to heaven, and her happiness would be the subject of his first aspiration.

Could he think then of another? could he dream that it was possible to love anyone but her? No! he did not, he could not! But as time wore on, and summer sank glowing into the arms of autumn, there came a deep light into the eyes of Neva, which pained, which alarmed him. He would sometimes, when he suddenly turned towards her, find her gazing upon him with a look of intense, thoughtful affection, which was followed by a warm and rapid blush; and without one feeling of empty vanity, Theodore began to see that his stay might produce evil to her who had so kindly tended him.

Still, however, Neva's regard assumed that air of simple, unrestrained frankness which is less frequently the token of love than of friendship. In her pure mind, and in her uncultivated land, all seemed clear and open before her. She felt no shame in the sensations which she knew and encouraged towards the young stranger. She saw no obstacle to prevent her from becoming his bride. She was the daughter of a king, but she knew him to be worthy of her love; and as that love became apparent to her own eyes also, she only felt proud of her choice. The sole difference which that knowledge of her own heart's feelings wrought in Neva was, that with her bright brown hair she now began to mingle gold and gems, and that from time to time a bright but transient glow would tinge her cheek when her eyes and Theodore's met. Far from shrinking from his society, far from trembling at his approach, she gave way at once to all the feelings of her heart as they arose; greeted him with glad smiles in the morning; sprang forth to meet him when he returned from the chase; sat by him in the lengthening evenings; and feeling the deep earnest love of first affection burning at her heart, she took no means to hide or to conceal it from others or herself.

Theodore had pondered over these things for some days, and considered how it were best to act; but he deceived himself in regard to Neva; and the very openness with which she suffered her passion to appear, made him believe that it was as yet unconfirmed. He compared it with the shy and trembling love of Ildica. He remembered the same kind affection in her, too, when a girl, ere their feelings took a warmer tone than brotherly regard; the candid display of preference for his society, and the interest in all his pursuits, which she had then evinced. He recollected also the change that had taken place as simple affection grew into intense love—how timid, how retiring, how apprehensive that love had been!—and by comparing those two stages of a passion he had known and marked, with the conduct of the lovely girl under whose father's roof he dwelt—as pure, as innocent, as full of real modesty as Ildica herself—he judged, that whatever her feelings might become, they were not yet such as might ever render them painful to herself.

As the period for which he had promised to remain had not yet expired, and he could assign no cause for suddenly absenting himself, he determined to seek the first opportunity of speaking in the presence of Neva, of the ties which bound him to her he loved. Little mention had hitherto been made of his family or his circumstances in his own land. The wife of Bleda seemed to take no farther interest in his former life than was connected with his mother and her nation; and Neva herself, in the present happiness which she derived from his stay amongst them, appeared never to remember that there was such a thing as *a past*, affecting him in a way she knew not—though that past was unfortunately destined to affect all the future for herself. She asked nothing, she thought of nothing, but of the present; and thus Theodore felt, that he would have to commence the subject himself. Though it was one he loved not to speak on upon every light occasion, yet he resolved to do so. But still, after long hesitation, he determined not to tell the tale of his early days when, sitting in the family of Bleda, every eye might be ready to mark his own emotions—or, indeed, those of others; for, although to his own heart he put forward the motive of concealing the expression of his feelings, his real inducement was consideration for the fair girl, who might be more moved, he feared, by the words he had to speak than he was willing to admit even to himself.

After two long days of unsuccessful hunting,

having found nothing within several miles of the village, he threw down his spear and arrows, declaring he would go no more; and on the following morning, while the dew was still upon the grass, Neva offered to lead him up to the fall of a river in the woods, whose roar he had often heard at a distance, but which he had never seen, so deeply was it buried in the intricacies of the forest. He gladly followed, resolved to seize that moment to tell her all. And yet Theodore was agitated, for he wished not to pain or to grieve her; but still he feared, from her whole manner, and from the tender light which poured from her blue eyes, that the words he had to speak would be displeasing to her ear. It was a bright morning, and between the tall trunks of the trees, over bush and underwood, and mossy turf, the slanting sun poured his golden light, in the first bright freshness of the rising day.

'What a lovely morning is this!' said Theodore, after they had walked on some way, for Neva had remained silent, under emotions of her own. 'What a lovely morning! how clear, how beautiful!'

'Have you not such in your own land?' demanded Neva.

'Oh yes,' answered Theodore, 'we have many; and these mornings and the evenings are our chief hours of delight, for the heat of the risen day is oppressive. I remember such a morning as this,' he added, willing to lead the conversation to the matter on which he desired to speak—'I remember such a morning, some four or five months ago, so bright, so beautiful, shining upon my path, as I returned from Constantinople, towards what I have always called my home.'

'And was it not your home?' demanded Neva. 'Did no one wait you there to welcome you?'

'Oh, several,' answered Theodore; 'several that I loved, and still love more dearly than anything else on earth.' Neva cast down her eyes, and her cheek grew deadly pale. 'There was my mother,' continued Theodore—'I mean the mother who has adopted me, and ever treated me as one of her own children.' The colour came again into Neva's cheek. 'Then there was my sister,' he went on. 'And last,' he added in a lower tone, 'there was my promised bride, my Ildica, who will one day be my wife.'

Neva spoke not, but the rose again left her cheek. That, however, was the only sign of emotion she displayed, except, perhaps, that she walked on more rapidly, and that her small feet brushed the dew from the grass on either side of the path, wavering as she went, with an unsteady pace. Theodore followed close to her side, scarce knowing how to break that painful silence. It had continued so long, that, ere a word was uttered, he heard the roar of the waterfall, and he resolved to speak, let it be on what it would. But at the first word he breathed, the fair girl pressed her right-hand upon her heart with a convulsive sob, and fell fainting at his feet.

Theodore caught her up in his arms, and ran on upon the path; he could not find the cataract, but the stream which formed it soon caught his eye; and laying Neva upon the bank, he bathed her brow with water from the river, and strove to recall her to herself by words of comfort and consolation.

At length she opened her eyes; and finding herself lying in the arms of the man she loved, with her head supported on his shoulder, she turned her face to his bosom, and wept long and bitterly. Theodore said little, but all he did say were words of kindness and of comfort; and Neva seemed to feel them as such, and thanked him by a gentle pressure of the hand. At length she spoke. 'I had thought,' she said, in the undisguised simplicity of her heart, 'I had thought to be your first and only wife. I was foolish to think that others would not love you as well as I.'

Theodore had now the harder task of explaining to her, and making her comprehend, that in his land, and with his religion, polygamy, so common amongst her people, could not exist; but the effect produced was more gratifying than he could have expected.

'Better, far better, that it should not,' cried the girl, raising her head, and gazing full in his face, with those earnest devoted eyes. 'Better, far better that it should not. Had you asked me, I could not have refused, feeling as I feel; but I should have been miserable to be the second to any one. To have seen you caress her, to have known that you loved her better, and had loved her earlier than you loved me, would have been daily misery; but now I can love you as a thing apart. You will marry her, and I have no jealousy, for I have no share: I will think of you every hour, and every moment, and pray to all the gods to make you happy with her you love. But oh, stranger, it were better, till I can rule my feelings and my words, and gain full command over every thought, that you should leave me.'

'Would to God!' said Theodore, 'that I had never beheld you, or that you could forget all such feelings, and look on me as a mere stranger.'

'Not for worlds,' she exclaimed, 'not for all the empire of my uncle Attila. I would not lose the remembrance of thee if I could win the love of the brightest and the best on earth. I would not change the privilege of having seen, and known, and loved thee, for the happiest fate that fancy could devise. Oh, Theodore, would you take from me my last

treasure? But, perchance, you think me bold and impudent, in thus speaking all that is at my heart, but if you do so, you do not know me.'

'I do, I do, indeed,' cried Theodore—'I do know, I do admire, I do esteem you; and had not every feeling of my heart been bound to another ere I saw you, I could not have failed to love one so beautiful, so excellent, so kind. Nay, I do love you, Neva, though it must be as a brother loves a sister.'

'Hush, hush!' she said. 'Make me not regret—and yet love so still. Forget, too, that I love you better, but, oh, believe that no sister ever yet lived that will do for you what Neva will; and in the moment of danger, in the hour of sickness, in the time of woe, if you need aid, or tendance, or consolation, send for me; and though my unskilful hand and tongue may be little able to serve, the deep affection of my heart shall find means, if they be bought with my life's blood, to compensate for my weakness, and my want of knowledge;' and, carried away by the intensity of her feelings, she once more cast herself on his bosom and wept. 'But you must leave me,' she continued, 'you must leave me. Yes, and when I see you again, I will see you calmly—not as you now see me. Yet you must have some excuse for going, and whither will you go?'

'When your uncle Attila bade me come into Dacia till his return,' replied Theodore, 'Edicon, who remained with me, affirmed that it was the monarch's will I should proceed to his own usual dwelling-place, on the banks of the Tibiscus.'

Neva thought for a moment, as if she did not remember the name; but then exclaimed, 'Ha! the Teyssa—what you call the Tibiscus we name the Teyssa. That is much farther on; but let my mother know that such were the directions of Attila, and she will herself hasten your departure; for my father and my uncle often jar, and my mother would fain remove all cause of strife. Or I will tell her,' she added, with a faint smile, 'I will tell her; and you shall see how calmly I can talk of your departure.'

She then spoke for some time longer, in a tranquil tone, of all the arrangements that were to be made; and as she did so, still, from time to time, her eyes were raised to the young Roman's face with a long earnest glance, as if she would fain have fixed his image upon memory, so that no years could blot it out. Then, in the stream, she bathed the traces of the tears from her eyes; and looking up calmly, though sadly, said, 'Let us go, my brother. It is sweet, but it must end.'

They took some steps homeward; but ere they had gone far she paused, and laying her hands upon his, she said, 'Oh, Theodore! promise me, that if ever, while you are in our land, you need help or aid, you will send to me. Send me this trinket back by a messenger;' and she gave him one of the small golden ornaments which she wore in her hair: 'send it me back, and I will come to you, be it wheresoever it may. Deeply as I love thee, I would not wed thee now for worlds; but, oh! I would give life itself to render thee some service, which should make thee say in after years, "Alas! poor Neva! she loved me well, indeed!"'

Thus wandered they homeward; and often did she pause to add something more, and to give some new token of that deep, and all unconcealed, but pure affection, which had taken so firm a hold of her young heart. Theodore, too, strove to soothe and to comfort her; and all that was kind, all that was tender—except such words as only the ear of the beloved should ever hear—he said, to give her consolation. As they came near the village, however, she spoke less, for she seemed to fear that her emotions might leave traces behind for other eyes than his; but she gained courage as they went on; and, to Theodore's surprise, when they joined the household, no sign of all the busy feelings which he knew to be active in her breast was in the slightest degree apparent, except, indeed, in a shade of grave melancholy which was not natural to her.

She chose the moment while all were assembled at the morning meal to announce to her mother the necessity of Theodore's departure. The matron had made some observation upon the young Roman's recovered health, when she replied, 'We shall lose him soon, my mother. He has been telling me that the commands of Attila, the king, were strict, that he should go on to the king's own dwelling by the Teyssa.'

She spoke calmly, so calmly, indeed, that there were but two persons amongst all the many who seemed to notice that she touched on things more interesting than ordinary. Theodore could not but know all the emotions which that calm tone concealed; and her mother, as soon as she heard the subject of her discourse, fixed her eyes upon her, with a look of mingled wonder, tenderness, and surprise, as if she, too, could see into her daughter's heart, and asked, by that glance, 'Can you, my child, talk thus calmly of his going?'

After that momentary pause, however, she replied aloud, 'If Attila bade him go forward, the king must be obeyed. My son, you should have told us this before; for though my husband is also a king, yet Attila is his elder brother, and we wish not to offend him.'

'If fault there be,' replied Theodore, 'the fault is mine. The commands of the king

affixed me no certain time; and I do, indeed, believe, that he named his own residence as my dwelling-place only for my greater safety.'

'"Tis not unlikely,' said the wife of Bleda, 'but still, my son, you must obey: tarry not here more days than needful; for we know not when Attila or Bleda may return.'

Theodore, too, knew that it was needful he should go; and yet he felt regret at quitting those who had treated him with so much kindness and tenderness; at leaving scenes in which he had known a brief interval of tranquillity and peace, after having undergone so long a period of grief, of horror, and of danger. He gave himself but the interval of one day, however; and then, in the early morning, his horse and his followers stood prepared at the door. The wife of Bleda gave him her blessing as he departed with motherly tenderness; and Neva herself stood by, and saw him mount, without a tear wetting the dark lashes of her tender blue eyes, without a sigh escaping from her lip. All she said was, 'Farewell, my brother: remember us.'

Theodore himself could have wept; and as he saw her stand there in her beauty, her innocence, and her devoted love, deeply and bitterly did he regret—ay, and reproach himself, for having, however unwittingly, brought a cloud over her sunshine, and first dulled the fine metal of her bright and affectionate heart. He sprang upon his horse, and rode away, turning back more than once to gaze upon them, as they stood gathered round the door of their dwelling, and to wave his hand in token of adieu.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE HERMITS.

THE life of man is a series of scenes, generally connected with each other, often by the strong bond of cause and effect, but often linked together by some fine accidental tie, having no reference to the principal events. Each day may be considered as one act in life's drama; and sleep comes with night to change the scenes, and give the weary actors a moment of repose. Sometimes, however, there breaks in amongst the rest—but detached from all those that surround it—a scene in which we live, and act, and interest ourselves for a limited and defined space of time, but which, when it is over, produces no effect upon our general fate, acts as no cause in the complicated machinery of our fortunes. Sometimes the scene may be fair and sweet, a solitary well in the desert, which cools our lip, and quenches our thirst, but supplies no river, waters no distant land. Sometimes it is terrible and dangerous, a thunder-storm, suddenly sweeping over the summer sky, coming when all is brightness, reigning an hour in awful majesty, and then passing away, and leaving the world as tranquil as it was before.

Theodore rode on, taking his way across the woods, and asking his heart what was to come next; what, in all the vast, vague variety of earthly chances, was the next thing that was to befall him on his onward way. When, but a few short months before, he had stood upon the mount of cypresses with those he loved, and had gazed over the calm splendour of the Adriatic Sea, with life all before him, and hope to lead him on, he had fancied that his fate would be as fair and bright as the glowing scene beneath his eyes; his future had promised to be as calm and unbroken by a storm as those tranquil waters, sleeping, unruffled, beneath the setting sun. Had any one less than a prophet then told him all that the next two months should witness, he would have laughed the prediction to scorn, in the full confiding hope of undisappointed youth. But now that for many a week every hour had brought its change, that he had seen the expectations of to-day to-morrow trampled under foot, and the sunshine of the morning darkened ere the evening's close, he had learned still to ask himself 'What next?' with every day that rose, and every change of scene that came upon him. That blessed reliance on the dear deluding tales of hope, which is youth's peculiar power, had left him for ever; and though the 'What next?' might be asked, with the determination of bearing all worthily, yet apprehension had always its share in the question too.

The woods were wide and intricate; and, as Theodore and his companions rode on, the trees and shrubs began to change their character: enormous beeches tossed about upon the rocks and rising grounds, succeeded to the beech and oak; and after them again came the tender larch, and the dark pine, as the road began to wind up into the mountains. It was a sultry autumn day; and the misty haze that hung about the world, with the close electric air of the forest, were ominous of a thunder-storm; and at length the clouds, gathering round the summits of the higher hills, burst upon the heads of Theodore and his followers, just as they had reached a spot, where, from the top of the first range of eminences, they could gaze over a wide range of forest ground. The rain poured down in torrents, the lightning flickered through the sky; but neither of those would have prevented Theodore from pursuing his way, had not the mountain paths they followed become so slippery with the rain that his horse could not advance, and even the lighter and more sure-footed beasts of the Huns could make no progress.

They were debating as to where they could find shelter, when suddenly they beheld, standing on the rock above, a tall thin human form, scantily covered by its tattered robes from the wind or storm. He was gazing down upon them without speaking; but Theodore, as soon as he turned his eyes that way, recollected the enthusiast Mizetus, who had attempted to persuade the people, during the earthquake in Dalmatia, to stay and perish amidst the ruins of the falling palace. He had heard long before that the enthusiast had wandered over many parts of the earth, and had dwelt long in deserts and barren places as an hermit, according to the prevailing superstition of the day; and the young Roman doubted not, that since he had been driven forth by the partial destruction of Aspalathos, Mizetus had again returned to his erratic life, and found his way to the frontiers of Pannonia. 'Go up to him, Cremera,' said Theodore—'Go up to him, and, telling him who we are, ask him where we can find shelter, for he must surely have some cave or hut wherein to dwell himself.'

The Arab obeyed, leaving his horse below; but the enthusiast made him no reply, gazing sternly and even fiercely at him, till the freedman used some angry words to drive him to an answer. He then exclaimed aloud, 'Get ye gone! get ye gone from me, ye miserable, worldly, self-seeking generation! get ye gone! Ye shall not pollute my dwelling. Farther on, ye will find one who will give welcome alike to the lustful Roman and the bloody, barbarous Hun. Get ye gone! I will have nought to do with ye. On, on upon the path, I say! Ye will find shelter onward, to cover your heads from the earthly storm, though not from the tempest of God's indignation.'

Cremera reported to his master the reply he had received, for the thunder prevented it from reaching at once any ears but his own; and Theodore, as the only course, slowly pursued the path along which Mizetus had pointed, looking anxiously, as he proceeded over the wet and slippery rocks, surrounded by precipices, and impeded by scattered fragments, for some sign of human habitation. It was long ere he discovered any, however; and was indeed passing on, when Cremera exclaimed, 'There is a cave! there is a cave! and something standing therein like the figure of a man.'

Theodore hesitated not; but leading his horse towards the narrow mouth of a cavern which he now beheld, ascended the steep path with risk and difficulty. The Huns followed; and though, on entering, they discovered that the object which Cremera had taken for a man was in fact a large crucifix, they found seated within the cave one of those many devout but enthusiastic beings, thousands of whom in that age devoted their lives to solitude and privation, on a mistaken principle of religion. Some subjected themselves to the most tremendous inflictions, thinking thereby to please God; and the pillar and the chain still find their place in history, as illustrations of human fanaticism. But the hermit here was of a different character: his enthusiasm had taken a different form; and though not less wild, perhaps we might say not less diseased, prompted him not to the severer sufferings which were indispensable to obtain the reputation of sanctity amongst the anchorites of the Thebais. He dwelt, it is true, but in a cavern of the rock; but that cavern, high up on the mountain side, was dry and not unwholesome: his dress was indeed composed of nothing but skins, yet the inhabitants of the country were principally clothed with the same materials, though arranged in a more convenient and agreeable form; his bed, which was raised high with rushes and forest hay, was piled up above that with soft and warm skins; and the contributions not only of some neighbouring villages on the other side of the hills, but of many distant towns (for the whole land regarded him as a holy being), supplied him plentifully with good and varied food. His appearance, however, was venerable; and his countenance, half covered as it was with a long white beard and a profusion of silvery hair, was calm, peaceful, and mild, and well calculated to obtain both reverence and love. There was, indeed, an occasional look of worldly shrewdness seen upon those high but withered features, which might have made many a suspicious man doubt the sincerity of his vocation; but there came also from his eyes, from time to time, gleams of quick uncertain light: whenever he approached particular subjects, too, his whole air and manner changed, his colour mounted, his eye flashed, his lip quivered; and Theodore could not gaze upon that countenance, under all its frequent changes, without believing that some slight touch of insanity had warped an intellect originally fitted for high and noble things. When he rose to welcome the strangers, his beard fell down below his girdle, and his long nails, untrimmed for many a year, were exposed in all their deformity. His manners, however, were noble, one might say courtly, for there was grace as well as dignity, and polished terms as well as mild and benevolent ideas. He asked no questions, neither whence the strangers came, nor whither they were going; but gladly gave them shelter from the storm, and spread before them such viands as his cell contained, pressing them to partake with hospitable care and blessing, in the name of God, the food to which he invited them. His eye, however, rested upon Theodore; and though the youth

had by this time adopted in a great degree the dress of the Huns, yet his air and countenance were not to be mistaken, and the hermit addressed him at once in Latin.

'There is a hermit from our native land,' he said, after some conversation upon other subjects, 'living near, and doubtless a holy and religious man he is; but the Almighty has not endued him with the spirit of sufferance towards his fellow-creatures, and he thinks that he cannot serve God without abhorring men. He was sent hither unto me some months ago by Eugenius, Bishop of Margus, to ask mine aid and counsel in dealing with the Huns; but, when he had received his answer, he would not depart, and has remained here ever since, doubtless sent as another thorn in my flesh.'

Theodore very well conceived how the wild enthusiast might become a thorn in the flesh of any one less fanatical than himself, and he replied, 'He refused us all shelter, but now, reverend father; and sent us on to thee in the midst of the storm, although I know him well. He dwelt for some two years at Aspalathos, on the Illyrian coast, and gained high repute for sanctity amongst the common people; but in the terrible earthquake in which we had all nearly perished, some five or six months since, he strove to persuade the people to remain instead of quitting the falling buildings, prophesying that the last day was about to appear.'

'He prophesy! my son,' cried the hermit, with a wild look of scorn; 'no, no; the gift of prophecy has not fallen upon him. It is for that he hates me: and, because I impart, as I am directed, the knowledge of those things that are revealed unto me, to all who ask it, he abhors and reviles me.'

Theodore made no reply; for the spirit of prophecy was claimed by many a one in those days: and though their predictions had often proved false and worthless, yet that extraordinary endowment had been too recently exercised and confirmed by facts for any one in that age to say that the purpose was accomplished, and the power withdrawn from the children of men. Theodore had learned, however, to doubt; and, therefore, he paused ere he gave credit to the gift which the hermit evidently wished to insinuate that he possessed.

'During the whole of this day,' continued the old man, when he saw that the young Roman did not answer, 'I have been waiting anxiously, looking for the approach of some stranger from distant lands. There has been a knowledge of the coming of some one upon me since the first dawn of day; but it was not thee I expected, my son. It was some one more powerful, some one more terrible, with whom I might have to wrestle and contend, I know not—I cannot have deceived myself. Still, it is now past the third hour, and no one has yet come.'

'I should think,' replied Theodore, 'that it were not likely any one would come; for all the great and powerful of the land are absent with Attila; and we have made a long journey this morning without encountering a living creature.'

'But have you had no tidings of Attila's return?' demanded the hermit. 'Some messengers, who passed by this place but two days ago, spoke of it as likely, and brought me presents from the king.

Theodore would not suffer himself to smile, although he thought that the hermit, like many another man, might deceive himself in regard to his own powers, and confound shrewd calculations with presages. The old man had heard, it seemed, that Attila was likely to return; the messengers might very probably have dropped some hint as to the time; and, the mind of the hermit himself having calculated the probabilities, the impression that it would be as he anticipated had become so strong that he looked upon that impression as a certain presage; and, if fulfilled, would consider it, thenceforth, as a new instance of his prophetical inspiration.

Theodore restrained all expression of such thoughts, however, and merely replied, 'Then, by his sending you presents, you already know Attila, and are protected by him?'

'I know him, my son,' replied the old man; 'but I am protected by a higher king than he is. He rather may call himself protected by me, or, at the least, *directed*, though he, as I am, is but an instrument in the hands of God. The sins of those who call themselves Christians have gone up on high,' he continued, whilst a wild and wandering gleam of light glistened in his eyes, and his pale cheek flushed—'the sins of those who call themselves Christians have gone up on high, and the vices of the east and the west have risen up to heaven as foul and filthy as the smoke of a heathen sacrifice. They have called down judgments upon the earth; lightnings, and tempests, and earthquakes, and sickness, and pestilence, and warfare; and, lo! amongst the visitations of God, I tell thee, young man, this Attila, the king, is one of the greatest—an appointed instrument to punish the iniquities of the land! So long as he shall do exactly the work assigned to him, and not disobey the word that is spoken, he shall prosper on his way, and shall sweep the lands from the east to the west, and from the north to the south: he shall stretch out one hand, and it shall touch the Propontic gulf; and he shall stretch out the other, and dip it in the German ocean; but neither the city of Romulus nor the palace of Constan-

tine shall he see or injure. He shall pull down the cities, he shall destroy the nations, he shall trample under foot the yellow corn, and the purple fig, and the sweet grape. Of their olive trees he shall light fires to warm him in the night; and with their flocks and herds he shall feed the myriads that follow him to victory and spoil. Armies shall not stand before him for an hour, and fenced cities shall not keep him out: he shall destroy wherever he cometh, and behind him he shall leave a bare plain; but the life of not one of those appointed to be saved shall he take; and if he touch but a hair of their heads, the power shall pass away from him, and he shall die a death pitiful and despised. Lo! he comes, he comes!' and spreading wide his arms, with a wild but striking gesture, he advanced to the mouth of the cavern, and gazed out upon the road below.

Theodore, who had also heard the sound of horses' feet apparently approaching up from below, followed the hermit and gazed forth likewise. The thunder had ceased, and the rain was falling but slowly, yet the ground was not less slippery and dangerous than when he himself had passed. Nevertheless, coming almost at full speed, was seen a horseman, followed by two others at some short distance behind. Not a false step, not a stumble, did the charger make; and Theodore at once perceived that the announcement of the hermit was correct, and that it was Attila himself who approached to within a yard of the spot where they stood. He came at the same headlong speed; and then, alighting from his horse, he threw the bridle over its neck and entered the cavern, with a slow, calm, and tranquil step. The monarch gazed at Theodore for a moment, as if surprised at beholding him there, but no slight emotions ever found their way to the countenance of Attila; and his only observation was, 'Ha! my son, art thou here?'

Theodore bent his head, and the monarch turned to the hermit, who pronounced in his favour a singular prayer, one, indeed, which Theodore imagined might give no light offence to the stern chieftain of the Huns. 'May God enlighten thine eyes,' he said, 'and purify thy spirit, and soften thy hard heart, and make thee quit the abomination of thine idols, so that thou mayst become a servant of the true God, and not merely an instrument of his vengeance!'

But Attila merely bowed his head, saying, 'May the truth shine upon me, whatsoever it is!'

'Have I not told thee the truth?' demanded the hermit; 'did I not tell thee thou shouldst conquer? Did I not say that no one should be able to oppose thee, if thou didst follow the words that were spoken unto thee?'

'I did follow those words,' said Attila; 'I spared Margus, as thou badest me, and I gave protection, as thou seest, to the first person who crossed the river to meet me;' and he turned his eyes upon Theodore.

'Ha!' cried the hermit, 'and was this youth he?—I spoke but the words that were appointed me to speak,' he added; 'but I had fancied that they had applied to another—not to him. God rules all these things according to his own wise will. Say, where met you the youth?'

Ere Attila could reply, the sunshine, which was now beginning to pour into the mouth of the cavern, was darkened by a tall form, which advanced with wild gestures, and placed itself directly before the monarch of the Huns. It was that of the enthusiast Mizetus; who, in the exalted and menacing tone in which he usually spoke, now addressed the king, exclaiming, 'Woe, woe, unto the nations that thou wert ever born! Woe, woe, unto the world, far and near, oh son of Belial, that thou didst ever see the light! Thou art dyed in blood; thou dost ride in gore. The earthquake precedes thee; blue lightnings march with thy host; famine goes forth on thy right hand, and pestilence on thy left.'

'Shall I slay him, O mighty king?' cried one of the attendants of Theodore, who had unsheathed his sword, and held it ready to strike the enthusiast to the earth.

'Slay him not,' said Attila, calmly, 'slay him not; the man is mad, and speaks the truth. What hast thou more to say, my brother? Thou hast but said what is true.'

'I have said what is true,' continued the enthusiast, 'and there is more truth to be said. Woe unto thee if thou dost not the will of God! I say, woe unto thee! for, if thou failest to do his will, all the evils that thou pourest forth upon the nations shall, in return, be poured forth upon thee; nor shalt thou raise thyself up in the pride of thine heart, and say, "It is I who do all these things!" Neither shalt thou suffer thyself to be puffed up by the praises of the weak beings who now surround thee. Know that thou art no more than a sword in the hands of the slayer; a rod in the hands of Him who is appointed to chastise. Henceforth and for ever cast away thy vain titles, and abandon thy idle pretences. Thy name is THE SCOURGE OF GOD; and through all nations, and unto all ages, by that name shalt thou be known.'

'I will fulfil thy words, and do accept the name,' replied Attila, calmly; 'yes, I will be called the Scourge of God; and truly,' he added, with a dark smile, 'I have already scourged the land from the Danube to the sea. But now, my friend, hast thou more to say? for though we reverence madmen, and those whose intellects the gods have taken into their

own keeping, still my time is precious, and I would be alone.'

'I am not mad, oh king,' replied the enthusiast; 'but I tell thee truth, and yet I leave thee, having given thee a name by which to know thyself, and by which thou shalt be known when thou and I shall have gone to our separate places;' and thus saying, he turned and quitted the cave.*

'I will also go, oh king,' said Theodore, 'and will proceed upon the way towards thy royal dwelling.'

'Do so,' said Attila; 'go not too fast, and I will overtake you soon.'

Theodore craved a blessing of the hermit, and then departed. The road still mounted for some way; but by this time the rain was over, and, as a drying wind rose up, the horses could better keep their feet upon the steep and rocky ground. Passing over the ridge of the mountain, the road, in about half-an-hour, began to ascend through woody glens and wild rocky ravines, similar to those which they had passed in ascending; and as Theodore slowly pursued his way, he revolved in his own mind that part of the conversation between the hermit and the mighty monarch of the Huns which referred more particularly to himself. It was not difficult to discover that, actuated by superstitious feeling, Attila had, in consequence of some vague warning of the hermit, spared the young Roman, not from any prepossession in his favour, but solely because he thought it the command of heaven, and a condition on which the success of his enterprise depended. Since those first events, however, the monarch had shown him kindness of an extraordinary character; and either from some vague notion of their fate being linked together, by some unexplained and mysterious tie, or from natural feeling of favour towards him, had evinced an interest in his fate and happiness which demanded gratitude. Theodore was not one to reason very nicely as to how far the motives of a benefactor lessen the obligation imposed by his kindness; and he only remembered that Attila had twice saved his life, as well as spared him where any other Roman would have fallen, when he intruded uncalled into the Dacian territory; that he had rescued from worse than death those he most loved, and had shown a kindly sympathy with feelings that few supposed him to possess. Thus, though he revolved the means of learning more of what were the first motives of the king in giving him such protection, he determined, as he rode on with his followers, to seek every opportunity of showing his just gratitude towards Attila.

They had not gone far, however, ere the sound of horses' feet was heard echoing among the crags; and in a moment after Attila was by the young Roman's side. A slight shade of triumphant pleasure—enough upon the countenance of Attila to tell that he was moved internally by no slight feelings of satisfaction—met the eye of Theodore as he turned to answer the monarch's greeting.

'Art thou quite recovered, my son?' demanded the king. 'We heard that thou hadst been ill, and likely to die; but the gods protect those whom they love.'

'I am now quite recovered,' replied Theodore; 'but I was very ill, and should have died, had it not been for the care and tenderness of thy brother's wife and children.'

'Let the good acts of the wife,' replied Attila, 'counterpoise the bad acts of the husband. But Bleda will not seek thy death now, I trust. We have made war in company; we have conquered together; and he has had a plentiful, a more than plentiful, share of the spoil. It was me he sought to injure more than thee; and now that his appetite for prey and power seems satisfied, he may heed the suggestions of prudence, and forget the ambition for which he has neither talent nor energy sufficient.'

Though the words of the king might have led to a fuller explanation of the mysterious tie by which he seemed to feel himself bound to Theodore, yet the interest of the young Roman was more strongly excited by the mention of barbarian triumphs in his native land, than by anything which could personally affect himself; and he replied, with an inquiring tone, 'I have heard nothing, O Attila! of thy progress since I left thee. I have received no tidings even of how the war has gone.'

'War!' said Attila, proudly; 'I call that war where brave men encounter one another, and fight till one surrenders or dies; but such is not that which the Romans have offered to Attila. Wouldst thou know, youth, how my march through Mœsia and Thrace has gone? Thus has it happened; but call it not a warfare, for warfare there has been none. I have marched upon the necks of conquered enemies to the Ægean Sea. Hœmus and Rhodope have not stayed me; seventy fortified cities have fallen before me; and the last Roman army which dared to look me in the face lies rotting in the Thracian Chersonese, as thou dost call it, or feeds the vultures from Mount Ida. I found the land a garden, and I left it a desert, even as I promised to do; but I say unto the weak thing that sits upon the eastern throne, "Why hast thou made me do this? Why hast thou called me to slay thy subjects and lay waste thy cities? I slept in peace, till

* It would appear, from various accounts, that the tremendous title by which Attila was well pleased to be known, was given to him as stated above, though some lay the scene of his interview with the hermit in Gaul.

I was wakened by thine injustice. My sword grew unto its scabbard; my people kept their flocks, and were turning tillers of the ground: the Danube flowed between calm and peaceful banks, and my people held out the hand of amity unto thine. I gave thee leave to trade within my land, and at the first mart where thy subjects appeared they plundered mine, and scoffed at the claims of justice. I demanded that he who, as I was told, had concerted the deed with others, Eugenius, the Bishop of Margus, should be given up to me; or some one, proved to be the robber, in his stead. Thou wouldst give me no justice, and I have taken vengeance; but the deed is thine, oh weak man, for thou wert the aggressor. Thou hast lighted the fire that has consumed thy land, and the punishment is not yet complete."'

'And did none resist thee?' demanded Theodore sorrowfully. 'Did none show that the spirit of our fathers still lives at least in some of the children?'

'Yes, yes,' replied Attila. 'There was one small city, called Azimus, whose children showed me what ancient Romans may perhaps have been. They were worthy to have fought beneath my standard, for they repelled that standard from their walls. They fought as thou wouldst have fought, my son, and they won the reverence and the love of Attila. I found that they might be slain, but could not be conquered; and I valued my own glory too much to risk it by crushing a race that I acknowledged to be worthy of life. All the rest fought, if they did fight, like cowards and like slaves, and I slew them without remorse; but I would not have destroyed those Azimuntines to have saved my right hand. Bear witness, youth, of what I tell you. My people have been robbed and plundered by the creatures of Theodosius; I demanded justice; it was refused; I took revenge. Thine emperor now seeks to treat, because he thinks he can deceive Attila; thou shalt witness his proceedings, and shalt judge whether I strike again without just cause. Attila slays not without cause; but thine is a lettered nation, and they will transmit a false tale of these deeds unto after times. We Huns write not our own histories.'

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE CHASE OF THE URUS.

THEODORE pursued his way with his own followers only, after the king had left him, to return to his host; and less than two days more brought him to the banks of the Tibiscus. At the third hour after sunrise, on the second day after meeting with Attila, he came in sight of one of the few fixed habitations of the wandering Scythians—the ordinary dwelling of the king. It was all unlike a Roman capital, and yet it was not an unpleasing scene.

Upon a wide plain, broken by some tracts of wood, and skirted by some rich sloping hills, at the foot of which it rested, stood a congregation of several thousands of low wooden dwellings, each separated from the other, and covering a large space of ground; but with all their lowliness, those houses were not without ornament—of a different kind, it is true, from that which decked the stately mansions of Rome or Constantinople, but suited to the buildings, the people, and the scene. Before each ran along the same long portico, supported by the trunks of trees, which Theodore had remarked in the dwelling of Bleda; and many an ornamental screen and piece of trellis-work gave lightness and beauty to various parts of the building. Trees were scattered here and there amongst the houses, giving shade to their high peaked roofs; and flowers and shrubs were not wanting, such as the infant art of the age and country could produce.

Many a busy group was there, engaged in all the peaceful occupations of pastoral life; and though here, as before, women and children formed the greater part of the population, a number of men—mingling with the other groups—showed Theodore that the land had not been so entirely left without defenders as he had imagined. As he rode on, and entered the streets—if by such name we can designate the wide open spaces between the houses—the population became more dense; and he observed amongst them every shade of complexion and every line of feature that it is possible to conceive. The colour and cast of countenance of the Huns was certainly more general than any other, but there also might be seen the Roman and the Greek, the beautiful tribes of Caucasus, the fair-haired children of the North, the Goth, the Vandal, and the Helvetian. Nor was this mixture merely apparent, but, on the contrary, it was borne out by the many tongues which struck the ear of Theodore as he rode along. There his own language was frequently heard, there the tongue of his mother's land was common; and not only did Theodore recognise Greeks and Romans as captives or bondsmen, but many walked free and armed amongst the rest of the population, as if holding rank and authority amongst them. The young Roman now began to perceive that Attila, with wise policy, had left the guardianship of his land during his absence to persons whose situation, as fugitives or exiles from their native country, would render their resistance to any invading force desperate, determined, and unconquerable. He himself, as he passed, excited no great attention, for the Roman features, with

the Hunnish dress, was too common amongst them to call forth much remark. Cremera, the Arab, however, by his powerful limbs and his gigantic height, drew all eyes upon the little troop, as it advanced towards the mansion of the king; and Theodore heard many an observation made upon him and his, in tongues which the speakers thought he could not understand, but which were familiar to his ear.

At length they reached the open space in which the dwelling of Attila was placed. It was merely a wooden building like the rest, but far more extended, and though as simple as any in some respects, yet much more ornamented and tasteful in others. Besides the principal mansion, a number of smaller houses were congregated in the same space, probably destined for the reception of his immediate officers and friends; but the whole mass of buildings thus collected was separated from the rest by a piece of open ground, spreading on all sides, to the extent of several acres. In this space a number of horsemen were exercising themselves with various arms, poising the spear, casting the javelin, drawing the bow, or urging the mock contest with the sword. Under the porticoes, and within the low screens, groups of women and children were seen employed in various household occupations and juvenile amusements; and the whole presented a picture of cheerful, active, and happy life, which might have taught an inexperienced heart to believe, that amongst that people was to be found the wished-for state, where busy life proceeded in peaceful tranquillity, without the cares, the anxieties, the jealousies, the strifes, of more civilised and more corrupt society.

Theodore rode on, as he had been directed, towards the gate of the principal dwelling; but he was surprised, and somewhat offended, as he came near, by one of the horsemen, who was careering in the open space, hurling a javelin right across his path, so as to pass within a foot of his head. Theodore's nerves, however, were too strongly strung to give way even to the slightest appearance of emotion, and urging forward his horse, rather than checking it, he passed on, without noticing a loud and scornful laugh, which burst from the young man who had cast the dart. Cremera, who rode a little behind his master, turned and gazed fiercely round, while the Hunnish youth, and those who were sporting with him, dashed in amongst the followers of Theodore, as if on purpose to disturb him, separating a part of them from the rest. Theodore was now turning to remonstrate; but he heard the chief of his attendants already in sharp discussion with his fellow-countrymen; and the first words that caught his ear made him resolve to abstain from even remonstrance, in a case which might add new causes of anxiety and circumstances of difficulty to his long and painful exile amongst the Huns.

'Know you who I am?' cried the youth who had hurled the javelin.

'Well!' answered Theodore's attendant. 'You are Ellac, the son of the king, yourself a monarch; but we are here under the shield of Attila, where his son himself dare not strike us; for Attila is just, and kindred blood shields no one from the stroke of his equity.' Some more words ensued; and Ellac at length said, 'Is not this he who has dared my uncle Bleda, and provoked him to anger?'

'We know nought of that, O king!' replied the attendant: 'all we know is, that we are given to this young leader by Attila the king, as true soldiers to their chief. We are commanded and are willing to die in his defence, and will guard him against any one, and every one, with our lives.'

'Have ye no tribe and chieftain of your own?' demanded Ellac scornfully. 'Where is the head of your own race, that ye have the base task of following a stranger?'

'The head of our race died upon the plains of Gaul, with fifty of our brethren,' replied the attendant; 'and it is not a base task to follow a sword which has drank deep even of the blood of our own nation.'

'If it have drunk the blood of our nation,' replied Ellac, 'he that wields it should be slain.'

'Such is not the will of the king,' replied the attendant; and he then added, 'Stop us not, O king, for we do our duty.'

The young chieftain sullenly drew back his horse, and turning with a look of angry comment to his own followers, he suffered those of Theodore to proceed. They accordingly rode on, and overtook the young Roman, who had preceded them by a few paces, just as he reached the light screens of woodwork which separated the palace of Attila from the open space around it.

There Theodore dismounted from his horse, and in a moment was surrounded by a number of those who were spending their idleness under the shade of the portico. A mixed and motley group they were, comprising old warriors, unfit any longer to draw the sword, beautiful girls of various ages—from that at which the future loveliness bursts forth from the green film of childhood, like the first opening of the rose, to that at which charms that have seen the fulness of the summer day spread out in their last unfaded hours, like the same rose when its leaves are first ready to fall. Children, too, were there, and many a slave from every distant land, with mutes and dwarfs, singers, jesters, and buffoons.*

* Both the Greek and Roman historians strive to

A number of these, as we have said, now crowded round Theodore, with looks of interest and expectation, while others, listless and unheeding, lay quietly in the sun, casting their eyes, with idle carelessness, upon the stranger, without thinking it worth their while to move. Many were the question that was now asked, and many were the curious trait which struck the sight of Theodore. But we most not pause to paint minutely the life and manners of the Huns. That Attila was on his march homeward was already known at the royal village, and orders had been received regarding the treatment of the young stranger. One of the houses in the same enclosure as that of the monarch had been appointed him for a dwelling; and having taken up his abode therein, he found himself served and supplied as if he had been one of the barbarian king's own children.

Although the scene which now passed daily before his eye was very different from that which he had witnessed at the dwelling of Bleda, and he found it more difficult to enter into the kindly intimacy of any of the barbarian families than he had done there, yet the same simple manners were to be seen. Large flocks and herds were daily driven out to pasture; from every dwelling poured forth the drove in the morning, and to every dwelling returned the well-fed cattle in the evening, with him who had been their guardian during the day, singing his rude song to cheer the empty hours.

The women, too, whatever their rank or station amongst the people, were seen sitting before their dwellings twirling the spindle in the sun, or occupied in other domestic cares which had long since been abandoned by the polished and luxurious dames of Rome.

The mixture of foreign nations with the Hunnish population had indeed produced a sort of mockery of the vices and luxuries of civilised capitals; and Theodore saw that simple fare, and coarse, unornamented garments, were by no means universal amongst the Huns. Gold and silver, and precious stones, appeared upon the persons and in the dwellings of many, and even the silken vestures of the East were seen amongst the female part of the inhabitants.

For several days Theodore remained almost totally without society; for after the first movement of curiosity the inhabitants of the palace took no further notice of him, and no one else sought for his acquaintance, except, indeed, some of those Romans who had abandoned their country and assumed the appearance of the Huns. Several of these, it is true, presented themselves at his dwelling, and would fain have looked upon him as one of themselves; but Theodore was on his guard, and he received their advances somewhat coldly. He was ready, indeed, to meet with kindly friendship any whom the arm of injustice had driven from their native land, and who preserved pure their faith and honour, but unwilling to hold an hour's companionship with men who had been scourged forth by their own vices, or had betrayed their native land for the gratification of any passion, whether the sordid hope of gain, the wild thirst of ambition, or the burning fury of revenge. Of all who thus came to him he was suspicious, and his doubts were not removed by their manners; for all more or less affected to graft upon the polish of the Roman the rude and barbarian fierceness of the Hun. Though accustomed to a more refined, though perhaps not a better, state of society, they endeavoured to assume the manners of the nation amongst whom they dwelt; and the mixture thus produced was both painful and disgusting to the feelings of the young Roman, whose character was too decided in its nature ever to change by its contact with others, and possessed too much dignity to affect manners of any kind but those which sprang from his own heart, tutored as it had been from youth in habits of graceful ease.

In all the visits of this kind that he received, and they were many, a topic of conversation soon presented itself which acted as a touchstone upon the exiles. This was the comparative excellence of the Roman and barbarian mode of life. Almost every one broke forth on the first mention of such a subject into wild and vague praises of the simplicity, the freedom, the purity of the more unrestrained and uncivilised nation into whose arms either fortune or folly had driven them; and all the common-places against luxury and effeminacy had been conned and noted down to justify as a choice that which was in fact a necessity —their abode amongst the Huns. But Theodore thought differently, and he expressed strongly his opinion.

No man hated more effeminacy, no one more despised sensual luxury; but he thought that refined manners and refined taste might exist with virtue, purity, even simplicity; and he thought also that as the most precious substances, the hardest metals, and the brightest stones, take the finest polish, so the most generous heart, the firmest and the most exalted mind, are those most capable of receiving the highest degree of civilisation.

impress their readers with the idea that the Huns were mere Scythian savages; but at every line they let fall something which impugns this assertion. We find that gold, gems, silver, tables, various kinds of drinks of their own manufacture, fire-arms and equipments, jesters, dwarfs, singing, and several games of chance were common amongst them; and in short that there was an extraordinary mixture of civilized arts with barbarian habits.

At all events, he felt sure that no one who had tasted the refinements of cultivated life could lose their taste for what was graceful and elegant; and that if, from any hatred of the vices or follies which had crept into a decaying empire, they fled to a more simple and less corrupted state, they would still prize highly, and maintain in themselves, that noble suavity, that generous urbanity, which springs from the feelings of a kind, a self-possessed, and a dignified mind.

These opinions, as I have said, he did not scruple to express boldly and distinctly; and he soon found that such notions, together with those he entertained regarding patriotism and the duty of every man towards his country, were not pleasant to the ears of his visitors. Some slunk away with feelings of shame, not altogether extinct in their bosoms. Some boldly scoffed at such prejudiced ideas; and only one or two, with calm expressions of regret, acknowledged that they felt as he did, and only lamented that injustice and oppression had driven them from the society in which they had been accustomed to dwell, and the refined pleasures which they were capable of enjoying, to the wilds of Dacia, and the company of barbarians. With these Theodore would not have been unwilling to associate: but ere he did so, he sought to see more of them, and to hear their history from other lips than their own; and, therefore, with a coldness of demeanour which was not natural to him, he received all advances from his fellow-countrymen.

Ellac, the son of Attila, he saw no more; and he was glad to be spared fresh collision with one who was evidently ill-disposed towards him, and who was so dangerous an enemy. He strove not to avoid any one, however, but walked forth alone amongst the houses of the Huns, with that fearless calmness which is generally its own safeguard. Still he saw, without choosing to remark it, that Cremera's apprehensions for his safety were greater than his own; and that though he ventured not to remonstrate against any part of his master's behaviour, yet whenever the young Roman went forth on foot towards the close of day, to enjoy the calm hour of evening in that tranquil meditation with which it seems to sympathise, he caught a glance, here and there, of the tall, dusky form of the Arab, following his footsteps with watchful care.

Sometimes the young Roman would ride out on horseback, followed by his attendants, to hunt in the neighbouring woods; and if any of the idler Huns followed their troop to join in the amusement, or to share their game, the skill and activity which Theodore had acquired excited their wonder and admiration.

Early on the morning of the seventh day after his arrival at the residence of Attila, he thus went forth, accompanied both by the Alani and the Huns who had been given to him, and rode along by the banks of Tibiscus, to the wide deep woods which, at the distance of about five miles from the village, swept up from the river, and covered the sides, nearly to the top, of a lateral shoot of those high mountains which crossed the country to the eastward.

He followed the side of the river as closely as the nature of the ground permitted, even after he had entered the woods, for he knew that about that hour the stags and the elks, then so common in the Dacian and Pannonian forests, came down to drink at the larger streams, seeming to disdain the bright but pretty rivulets that sparkled down the sides of the mountains. He had heard, too, that such was the case with the urus, or wild bull; but that animal was scarce even in those northern solitudes, and he had not any personal knowledge of its habits.

Remarking the course of the stream when first he entered the wood, he ordered his attendants to spread out at some distance from himself, and drive the game towards the river, the banks of which he himself proposed to follow. Little appeared, however, and that of a kind not worthy of pursuit. A wolf, indeed, crossed his path, and, casting his javelin at it, he struck the grim robber of the fold down to the ground; but shaking it quickly from his weapon he passed on, and for near an hour followed the side of the stream, hearing from time to time the cries of his attendants, as they shouted, both to give notice to their companions of the course they were pursuing, and to scare the game from the lair.

Mingling other thoughts, of a more heartfelt and interesting kind, with the alternate expectations and disappointments—trifling, indeed, but still exciting—of the chase, he did not remark that after a time the voices of his followers sounded less and less loud, and that the river swept away more than he had calculated towards the west. Cremera, indeed, he saw from time to time emerge from the deeper parts of the wood to catch a glance of him, and then plunge in again, and he fancied that the others were not far distant. But at length all the sounds ceased, and after some time he became aware that he had strayed considerably from the direction which he had proposed to take. He heeded it not much, however, saying to himself, 'They will soon rejoin me; the river sweeps round again not far on.'

As he thus thought, he heard the distant cry of dogs, and putting his horse into a quicker pace, he hurried on towards the spot from which the sounds proceeded. They were faint and far off, however; but as he

rode forward they seemed to advance upon him, winding hither and thither in the wood, and he thought, as his practised ear caught the sounds, 'It must be an elk they are upon; they cry more eagerly than on a stag.'

There were some high grounds above him, but covered with deep wood; and though, soon after, Theodore could hear the musical voices of the hounds pass across the upland, and could even catch the rushing and crashing sound of some large beast passing through the underwood, he could neither see dogs nor game. He thought, however, 'That is no elk! It does not bound like an elk—most probably a wild boar; and if so, one of enormous size.'

Then, giving a hasty glance to the river, he exclaimed, 'It turns there; the brute must either take the water, face the dogs, or come back hither by the open ground;' and urging his horse as close as possible to the stream, he rode on to meet the animal, whatever it was, just as it burst from the wood. As he approached, he heard that he had calculated rightly, by the turn which the dogs took; and he paused, that he might fling his javelin with a surer aim.

At that moment, however, a cry like that of a human being in pain or fear caught his ear, proceeding from amongst the trees just before him; and, dashing on to give aid if the beast were brought to bay, he plunged his horse in amongst the brushwood, passed in a moment a narrow slip of forest that impeded his sight, and found himself in a small open space, round three sides of which the river bent like a sickle.

One object, however, in that space occupied all his attention, one feeling took possession of his heart, and but one course was left him to pursue. In the midst, clothed in a shaggy mane, with foam covering its black nostrils and fury flashing from its dark sinister eyes, its foot planted on a hound that it had just killed, and its enormous neck bent and head drawn back, in act to strike again with the short but pointed horns upon its wide square brow, stood the urus, which the dogs had driven from its mountain solitudes.

Before it, prostrate on the earth, and panting in the agonies of death, lay one of the small horses of the Huns, with streams of blood pouring forth from a tremendous gore in its side. Fallen with the fallen horse lay a boy of about twelve years of age, splendidly apparelled after the barbarian fashion, and with one small hand raised and grasping a sword, he made a vain effort to strike the fell adversary that was rushing upon him.

On one moment hung life or death; and, even while his horse was clearing the last brushwood, Theodore, with all the strength and swiftness of youth and vigour, hurled his unerring javelin at the monster. It struck him but slightly, for the youth's hand was shaken by the spring of his horse; but it flew so swiftly, that the sharp steel cut through the tough hide upon his back just as he was dashing forward to crush the boy to atoms. It shook and turned him; and as the young Hun writhed partly on one side, the fury of the animal's stroke was spent upon the dying horse. Mad, however, with pain, he now turned upon his new assailant; but Theodore, active as well as strong, snatched the second javelin from his saddle bow, sprang from his horse, and met the brute as he rushed upon him.

With his head down and his eyes closed, the urus rushed on: but Theodore, though knowing his danger, was neither fearful nor unprepared, and when the animal was within two steps of where he stood, he darted on one side, and then plunged the spear into its back. The weapon struck against the bone, however—stopped—broke short off; and, but little injured, the bull turned upon him again.

There were now the cries of coming huntsmen, but no time was left for distant succour to arrive. On himself, on himself alone, the young Roman was forced to depend; and, drawing his short sword, he again stood prepared to meet the assault of his adversary. With his eyes not now closed as before, but keenly watching his prey, the urus again rushed upon him; and Theodore, knowing that, though his sword was sharp, and his arm was strong, it was in vain to strike at that bony head, or that thick and heavy mane, again sprang on one side, but farther than before, more to avoid the first rush than to strike the animal as he passed.

The bull, however, was not again deceived, but followed him like lightning; as he did so, however, the coming huntsmen and dogs, rushing through the trees, met his ferocious eye. He wavered for a moment between flight and vengeance—exposed, as he turned, his side to the arm of the young Roman—and Theodore, seizing the moment, plunged the keen blade into his chest up to the hilt, casting himself forward upon the beast with such force that they both fell and rolled upon the ground together.

The weapon had found the heart of the fierce animal; and after but one faint effort to rise, his head and hoofs beat the ground in the bitter struggle of the fiery and tenacious life parting from the powerful body, till with a low bellowing groan he expired.

Theodore raised himself from the ground, and drawing his sword from the carcase of the urus, he gazed round upon the scene in which the strife had taken place. Greatly was it altered since he had last looked about him, for it was filled with a multitude; and

when Theodore turned his eyes towards the spot where had lately lain the boy he had just saved from death, he saw him raised up from his dead horse, and clasped in the arms of Attila himself.

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE NEW FRIENDS AND NEW ENEMIES.

THEODORE stood bewildered in the midst of the strange scene which now surrounded him, his thoughts all hurried and confused from the fierce strife and imminent peril into which he had been so suddenly hurried. At first, when he had turned to follow the cry of the dogs, he had forgotten—in the eagerness of the noble sport, the primeval pastime of earth's giant sons—that his own attendants were now unaccompanied by the hounds with which he had been accustomed to hunt in the forest near Bleda's dwelling; and, from the moment he had first seen that noble-looking boy, to that in which he rose from the prostrate carcase of the ferocious beast, that had so nearly destroyed him, there had been no time for any other thoughts, but those connected with the fierce combat in which he was engaged.

Now, however, as he looked round, he divined the whole, while knowing the custom of those barbarian chiefs to pursue the chase as eagerly while marching along with hostile armies, as when it served to solace the vacant hours of peace. That he had fallen in with the hunt of Attila he clearly perceived; but who was the boy that he had saved, he could only gather from the fond embrace, with which the dark monarch held him in his powerful arms. Fond and tender, no one who saw it could doubt what that embrace really was; and yet scarce any sign of emotion could be discovered on the iron countenance which so often led the slaughter in the fiercest fields of barbarian war.

The boy was talking eagerly and rapidly, and pointing to Theodore as he rose; and the moment after, while the young Roman drew forth his sword from the side of the mighty beast, that lay cumbering the earth like a huge grey mound, the king set his son down, and after resting his broad hand on his head for a moment, strode across the open space, and stood by the side of the boy's deliverer.

For an instant his eye ran over the tremendous limbs of the urus, the broad square head, the tangled mane, from amidst the thick coarse hair of which the dark blood was pouring out in streams, and upon the sharp pointed horns, one of which had burrowed in the earth, as he had rolled over in the agonies of death—and then he turned his look upon his boy. The next instant he held out his hand to Theodore, saying, 'Thou hast saved my child!—Well and truly did yon holy man declare, that the safety of myself and of my race depended upon him whom I should first meet, as I marched against the Romans; and that the first act of forbearance and mercy which I showed should be followed by benefits that I could never repay. Nor was that all. When you met me on the mountain, young Roman, scarce a week since, that same old man, gazing from the brink of the Everlasting, and beholding the future like a valley at his feet, traced out the after life of this my youngest son. He should escape from mighty perils, the prophet said, and be the last who should survive to carry on my race. Has he not now escaped from mighty peril by thine aid? and though it was foredoomed, deep and heartfelt is the gratitude which I owe thee, for saving the life of this, my boy, at the immediate hazard of thine own. Attila thanks thee, and will keep the memory of this deed in his heart. I have called thee my son, oh Theodore, and shalt thou not be unto me a son indeed? Ay, and a well beloved son too, only next in place to him whom thou hast rescued from untimely death.'

'I am still thy debtor, oh Attila,' replied Theodore; 'once hast thou spared me, when I intruded on thy territories; twice hast thou saved my life, knowing me to be a Roman, and an enemy; and I have only rescued this fair boy, whom I would have saved as unhesitatingly if he had been the son of the poorest warrior in the Hunnish ranks;' and as he spoke, he held out his hand towards the youth, who had advanced nearly to his father's side, and who seized it eagerly, and clasped it with a grateful gesture to his heart.

'Let mutual benefits bind us to each other, my son,' said Attila. 'I loved thee from the moment my eyes lighted upon thee. Whether it was a feeling sent by the gods to tell me that I should owe thee much I know not, but I loved thee then, and how much more do I love thee now? Thou shalt find that though those, who unjustly oppose the will of Attila, injure his friends, or insult his people, die by the death they merit, yet those who risk their lives in the defence of him or his are not forgotten in the time of gratitude.—But come thou with me. We march by slow journeys, that the host may diminish as we cross the land; to-morrow, however, I shall sit once more in mine own seat. Come, then, with me, and spend this night in our camp; to-morrow we will find another place of repose.'

Thus saying, the monarch mounted; a fresh horse was soon found for the boy Ernac; and Theodore followed by the side of the youth, who, talking to him eagerly in the Hunnish

tongue, thanked him over and over again with simple sincerity for the service which had been rendered to him. There was something noble and frank in the manners of the boy; and as they went, he told his deliverer how the whole of that day's adventure had come about; how he had gone forth from the palace four or five days before to meet his father on the march homeward; and how in that day's hunting he had been stationed near the river's brink to watch for the smaller game as it was driven down to the water; and then, when the urus appeared, how he had fancied he would please Attila by killing such a gigantic beast as that. He dwelt, too, on all he felt when he found his horse slain and himself at the mercy of the enraged monster, and Theodore experienced a double pride and pleasure in having saved so promising a child.

From time to time, as they rode on, the young Roman cast his eyes around, and listened somewhat anxiously for the coming of his own attendants, fearing that they might seek for him long in those dark woods. Cremera, however, he had seen amongst those who stood around when he rose from his contest with the wild bull; and he doubted not that the others would soon gain some knowledge of the path he had taken, from those who had been left to bring away the body of his huge antagonist, as a trophy of the sylvan war.

He mentioned that he had missed his attendants, however, to his young companion Ernac, who laughed with boyish glee at his apprehensions, adding, 'Oh, they will find you ere an hour be over. We Huns have ways of tracing our way through the thickest forests that you Romans do not understand;' and the proud emphasis which a mere boy laid upon 'we Huns' showed Theodore how strong had become the national pride of the people under the victorious reign of Attila, though he could not but feel painfully, at the same time, the deep contempt which had fallen upon the once tremendous name of Rome. Ernac's anticipations, however, in regard to the attendants, did not prove false; for as the hunting train of the dark monarch rode on through the wilds, every now and then Theodore perceived the person of one of his own followers appearing between the trees, and taking his place amongst the rest. Attila proceeded slowly, and as he rode on spoke to no one, except when he turned, and with an unwonted smile of fond paternal love, addressed a few words to his rescued boy.

At length, towards evening, they emerged from the forest; and entering one of the plains which here and there diversified the country, they approached once more the wild and extraordinary scene presented by a Hunnish camp. At a considerable distance Theodore could see it as it lay upon the slope of one of the uplands, with the dusky millions moving about in their various occupations, with a bustling, whirling activity, like ants in one of the large ant-hills of that very land. As they approached nearer, the different masses seemed to separate; and the camp assumed the same appearance—with its fires and circles of wagons—that it had presented when Theodore before beheld it in the Roman territory.

Approaching the central circle, which formed the abode of Attila, the monarch turned towards the young Roman, saying, 'You follow me!' and passing on, he led the way within the boundary.

The space enclosed for the monarch's own dwelling was large, and filled with a number of Huns, busy in various preparations. A change, however, seemed to have come over the tastes of Attila since his successful invasion of the Roman territory, for many more of the external marks of dignity of station surrounded his abode. In the midst of the circle, too, stood a magnificent tent, which had evidently once belonged to one of the luxurious generals of the Eastern empire, but which was now surmounted by the same black eagle that ornamented the standards of the Huns. Thither Attila himself proceeded, while all made way for his footsteps with looks of awe and respect, not servile, not timid, but seeming only the expression of heartfelt reverence for the daring courage, the powerful genius, the mighty mind, which nature had implanted in the breast of him whom the accident of birth had made a king.

Theodore paused, and looked to the boy Ernac, who seemed to understand his doubts at once, and replied to them by saying, 'Yes, stay you here, and make your people get you provisions! I will go in to my father, and see what is his will with regard to you; but I must wait till he speaks to me, for I dare not address him first.'

The young Roman was by this time sufficiently accustomed to the manners of the Huns to make himself at home amongst them, without uneasiness or restraint; and proceeding nearly to the verge of the circle, he lay down upon the ground, while the Huns who accompanied him, and who had by this time separated themselves from the followers of the monarch, lighted a fire, and sought for provisions in the camp.

He gave himself up to a fit of musing, regarding the events of the day, and the difference of his own feelings now, compared with what they had been but a few months before. At that time, when he at first met Attila—though he had experienced on beholding him, even before he was aware of his name and station, sensations which he could not define

—he had regarded the monarch of the Huns but as the talented chief of numerous barbarian hordes. Now he felt hourly creeping over him more and more of that same kind of awe with which the various nations under his command seemed uniformly to regard their chief; and Theodore tried to investigate in what consisted that peculiar power which was producing such an impression, gaining such an ascendency, over a mind not unconscious of vigour, activity, and brightness. He revolved the words, the conduct of Attila in every respect, and he could attribute this effect to nothing, were it not to the combination of many great and powerful qualities, seldom united in one man, but, as it were, all cemented together in the mind of Attila by a certain calm, deliberate sternness, which never left him except in the fiercest fury of the sanguinary strife. His every thought seemed stern; and the unshaken and extraordinary calmness which he possessed on all occasions, appeared to give him instant and perfect command over all the powerful talents which he possessed. There could be no such thing as doubt or hesitation in his nature; and to that godlike certainty of purpose Theodore attributed the power over the minds of others which he so singularly possessed.

While he thus lay musing, forgetful of the scene around him, a sudden step woke him from his reverie, and the next moment, his former antagonist, Arderic, King of the Gepidæ, cast his huge bulk upon the ground beside him. 'Well, my friend,' he said, looking upon the countenance of Theodore, and running his eye over the limbs of the youth, manly and strong as they were, but still infinitely inferior in muscular strength to his own, 'Well, my friend, when last we met it was in deadly strife, and now in calm friendship after our contest is over. I love the brave, whether they be enemies or not; and when the boy Ernac, who is not unlike thee in face and manners, told me thou wert here, I resolved to come and see thee, that I might discover, if I could, how one who seemed to me but a stripling could give me more trouble in the combat than a whole cohort of his countrymen. I cannot understand it, even now, for thou art very young, and certainly not yet in strength mine equal. Thou art more active, perhaps, but that will not do everything. However, let us not talk of strife! I come to eat and drink with thee, that the bond of hospitable union may be strong between us.'

'Gladly will I make it so, noble Arderic,' replied Theodore. 'The generous and noble soon become friends, whenever they cease to be enemies. You spared my life when you might have taken it, and I will love you not a bit the less because you vanquished me.'

'I spared you not, good youth, for your own sake,' replied Arderic, frankly; 'I spared you for the sake of Attila, my friend. I would have slain you at the next blow, had it not been for him; for at that moment my blood was heated. You had, with your own hand, killed three of my people, and I had not time nor coolness to think just then that you were a brave youth and a noble spirit, and that it were a pity to cut you off so soon. I may have thought so since; and from my heart I forgive you for thinning our ranks of two or three of those startled foxes, who fled before you when you burst amongst them, as if they thought you must be some evil demon, to dare, with but two comrades, to attack a whole tribe.'

'You held as prisoners, noble Arderic,' replied Theodore, 'those whom I valued far more than life itself; and my only calculation was, how long I could bar the way against your warriors, while those I sought to save effected their escape.'

'I thought so,' rejoined the King of the Gepidæ, 'I thought so; and now I hear that your mother and that fair girl—who is not your sister—are amongst your kinsmen of the Alani. Why go you not to see them?'

'Because,' replied Theodore, 'I have promised to stay with Attila for full seven years.'

'Oh! he will give you leave to go,' replied Arderic. 'Use him but nobly, and Attila is ever kind and generous. He will give you leave to go. When first he speaks to you, lead you the conversation to your wishes; and besides,' added the chief, with a grave and warning look, 'I think it may be better for you to be absent from this land for a brief space. Bleda, the brother of the monarch, loves you not. He is ambitious; and men scruple not to say, amongst the leaders of nations who obey and accompany the great king, that his hatred towards you proceeds from some idle prophecy, which combines the safety of Attila with thine. I say not that he would slay his brother; but he would little scruple, men affirm, to take away the life of one whose existence was important to the monarch's safety. I believe not in such prophecies,' added Arderic, after a pause of thought—'I believe not in such prophecies; but Attila, and Bleda, and many others do. They think that a man's destiny is fixed and known long before his birth; that every little act which he performs is but one part of a great necessity; and that, such being the case, the gods give intimation of what they have already determined to certain men peculiarly chosen for that purpose. I believe, on the contrary, that everything takes place by accident; and that if the gods interfere at all with what we do, it is but to drive us on again upon

our way, as a herd does to a stray bull that wanders from the drove. I put no faith in such prophecies, and I see that even those who do, strive as much to have their own way against destiny, as those who think that there is no such thing. Now, Bleda would take your head to-morrow, in order to put his brother's fate out of joint; and Ellac, they say, has no great love for you, though he be Attila's son. But his hatred proceeds merely from overbearing pride. He loves his father, and would not injure him; but he likes not that Attila should favour or promote any one but himself.'

'I will take care to give him no offence,' replied Theodore. 'I seek no promotion at Attila's hands, because, as a Roman, I can receive none. His love, I believe, I already possess; but Ellac will not envy me that, when he finds that it is followed by no benefits demanded or conferred.'

'It is therefore I say,' answered Arderic, 'that it would be well for you to be absent from this land for a short space. Bleda's ambition will not let him rest, though Attila thinks that he has sated him with honours and with spoil. But the grave, and ambition, and avarice are insatiable. Bleda's ambition will not let him rest, I say; and these things will come to an end ere many months be over! But here come thine attendants and mine loaded with food, far more than we need, yet let us partake.'

There was something so frank and noble in the bearing of Arderic, that Theodore was not unwilling to possess his friendship; but scarcely had they tasted the meal placed before them, when a messenger from Attila called the young Roman to his presence. Without delay, he followed the Hun to the tent of the monarch, whom he found with Ernac, his youngest son, alone.

Attila was seated on a rude bench, and clothed in the simplest garments of his race; but yet there was still that indescribable calm dignity which, perhaps, had greater and more extraordinary effect from the harshness of his features and the want of accurate proportion in his limbs. He greeted Theodore kindly, and made him sit down beside him; and once more touching upon the events of the morning, he spoke of the skill and dexterity, as well as strength and courage, which were required in hunting the wild bull, saying that few but the most powerful and the most daring of their own practised hunters were at all competent to meet that ferocious beast when brought to bay. He asked where Theodore had learned his skill in the chase; and the youth's answer, informing him how long he had remained with the family of his brother Bleda, threw the monarch into a fit of musing.

'Then thou hast never quitted the territory of the Huns since thou didst first enter it?' demanded Attila.

'Never, oh king,' replied the young Roman. 'I plighted my word to thee that I would not.'

'Not in a direct manner,' answered Attila; 'and I thought that strong temptation might have led thee to the land of the Alani. I would not inquire: it sufficed me that thou hadst returned.'

'My word, oh king,' answered Theodore, 'whether directly or indirectly given, is never violated. That which I have knowingly implied, that will I execute, as willingly and punctually as if I had sworn to perform it. Many a time did I inquire for tidings from the land of the Alani; but though I gained none, I never dreamed of going. I would not even write, though I thought once of doing so, and sending it by one of those who followed me.'

'And why not write?' demanded Attila.

'Because,' replied Theodore, 'coming as I did, a stranger to thy land, and seeing, as I did see, that it was left without defence, that there were few but old men, or women, or children remaining in the country—for I had not yet come on hither—seeing all this, I would not, even by sending a messenger from thy territories to a nation which has daily communication with the Gauls, give thee just cause to say that thou hadst trusted me, and I had betrayed thy undefended country to Ætius and his legions.'

'Thou art wise and honest,' rejoined Attila; 'and thine honesty shall win full reliance. Hast thou never longed to see those once more whom thou didst part from so sadly between the Margus and the Danube?'

'Have I longed!' exclaimed Theodore. 'Oh king! many and many has been the night that, after the hardest day's hunting, I have passed without the soft finger of sleep touching mine eyelids, thinking deeply of those dear friends of mine early youth, and thirsting to behold them again, as the weary traveller in the desert thirsts for a draught of water from the well-remembered fountain in his own domestic hall. It has been my dream by night, when slumber has shut out the world's realities. It has been my dream by day, when thought has wandered on from objects present to a world of her own, with hope and imagination for her guides. Oh, how I have longed to see them once again!' and, clasping his hands together, the youth fixed his eyes upon the ground, and seemed to plunge into the visions of happiness which his words called up.

'Thou shalt go,' said Attila, 'and taste the joy for which thou hast pined. Yet rest with me two days, in order that my brother Bleda may betake himself to his own abode, and leave the path open to thee without danger. Not

that I think he would hurt thee now: he is sated with plunder and with conquest. Nevertheless it were as well to wait; for though he left the camp this morning to bend his steps homeward, yet he goes but slowly, and his followers are not safe. Still, thou shalt go after two days are at an end. Go, Ernac, my son, and learn from Onegisus if any of the followers of thine uncle Bleda are still in the camp.'

The boy departed without a word, and Theodore remained with Attila, who proceeded to fix the time within which he bound Theodore to limit his absence. 'The full moon will see thy departure,' he said, 'and she shall once fill up her crescent during thine absence; but ere the second time of her fulness thou shalt return, or thou art false to Attila. Wert thou to stay longer, the snows would impede thy return; and in the long evenings of the winter I would have thee here, for I might seek to hold discourse with thee upon the state and changes of thy native land. Thou art one who, having guarded his honesty in dishonest times and amidst dishonest people, deserves that thy words should find attention.'

Almost as he spoke, his son Ernac returned, saying, 'Bleda is gone, my father, and all his followers, except his household slaves, who follow by daybreak in the morning, with Zercon, his black jester. I saw the foul slave myself; and he said his master had gone away so quickly, because, having taken so much plunder from those who were weaker than himself, he feared to be left with those who were stronger, lest they should begin the game again.'

'Thou saidst nothing of this youth's journey, I trust,' said Attila.

'Nothing,' replied the boy. 'But when Zercon asked me if the Roman youth were still here, I answered yes, but that he would not be here long.'

'Unwisely answered, my son,' said Attila; 'but it matters not; I will send those with him who can protect him. Thou shalt lead back a troop of the Alani to their own land,' he continued, turning to Theodore; 'and in the meanwhile keep near my person. Take thy place beside Edicon as we march to-morrow, and now sleep you well. Ernac, where is thine eldest brother? Has he left the camp already, after having so lately joined it?'

Theodore was departing as the monarch spoke; but ere he had quitted the tent, he had heard the boy's reply. 'No, my father,' answered Ernac: 'he has gone a short way on the road with my uncle Bleda.'

A slight shade came over Attila's brow; but Theodore was not sorry to hear that two men who were certainly his enemies were absent for a time from the camp, and rejoining his own followers, he lay down to sleep in peace, followed by the happy hope of soon seeing again those whom he loved best on earth.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE BITTER WRONG.

In the audience-hall of the rustic palace of Attila, towards the middle of the subsequent day, were assembled the chiefs of all the different nations he commanded; and at once strange and brilliant was the display of wild, but rich and picturesque, attire which there presented itself. The gold and silver of conquered nations, the trinkets and precious stones of many a plundered palace, were mingled with the shining steel and rich furs of the conquerors; and scarcely could the luxurious court of those famed eastern monarchs, whose effeminate splendour had become a bye-word in the world, exceed in the blaze of gems and gold the hall of the dark monarch of the Huns. But in the midst of all, and distinguished from all by the perfect simplicity of his garb, sat Attila himself, with his large hand resting on the iron hilt of his broad heavy sword. Kings of an hundred different nations stood around, gazing with awe and veneration upon that dark plain man, and acknowledging in every look and gesture the mighty influence of superior intellect. Beside these, on either hand were placed the many sons, and the favourite friends of the monarch; amongst the last appeared Onegisus, Edicon, and Theodore; and a number of slaves and attendants, covered with barbarian ornaments, filled up the rest of the wide space.

What had passed before needs not description, but at the moment we now speak of a messenger from the weak Theodosius was brought into the presence of the king, with the aspect of a trembling slave approaching an offended master. Attila gazed upon him sternly as he came near, and Theodore felt the indignant blood rush up into his cheeks, as he witnessed the degradation of his country.

'Art thou of what thy nation calls of patrician rank?' demanded Attila, when the ambassador, with his forehead almost bending to the ground, had approached within two steps of the monarch.

'Alas, no,' he answered; 'I am but the humblest slave of Attila the king.'

'If thou art my slave thou art happier than I believed thee to be,' replied Attila; 'for to be the slave of a slave is a humbler rank than any that we know on this side of the Danube. Yet such thou art, if thou art the servant of Theodosius. How dares he,' continued the king, fixing his keen black eyes fiercely upon

him, 'how dares he to send any but the noblest in his land to treat with him who sets his foot upon his neck? 'Tis well for thee that thou art but a servant, and that therefore we pardon thee, otherwise hadst thou died the death, for daring to present thyself before me. But now, get thee gone!—Yet, stay! Edicon, we will that thou shouldst accompany him back to the vicious city of Theodosius, the womanly king of an effeminate nation. Thou shalt go into his presence and say unto him, 'How is it that thou hast been so insolent as to send any of blood less noble than thine own, even to lick the dust beneath the feet of Attila? As thou hast so done, thou shalt be exiled again by the same hand that hast smitten thee; for Attila, the king, thy master and mine, bids thee prepare a place for him." Thus shalt thou speak—in these words and no others.'

'Oh king! I will obey thee to a word,' replied Edicon. 'When wilt thou that I set out?'

'Ere the earth be three days older,' answered Attila; 'take that Roman slave from my presence; to see him offends mine eye. Now, what tidings from my brother Bleda?' he continued, turning to a warrior who stood near, dressed in glittering apparel.

'He greets thee well, oh king! and bids me tell thee that, after resting in his own dwelling for a space, he will lead his warriors towards the banks of the Aluta, if thou dost not need his services against thine enemies.'

Attila turned his eyes towards Arderic, who cast his down, and smoothed back the beard from his upper lip.

'Fortune attend him,' said the monarch; 'and thou mayest tell him, my friend, that as he will be in the neighbourhood of the revolted Getæ, he had better, if his time permit, reduce them to a wise and bloodless submission, otherwise Attila must march against them himself, and this hand strikes but once. Bid good fortune attend him, and wisdom guide him in all his actions!'

Attila placed a peculiar emphasis on his words, but his countenance underwent no variation. Such, however, was not the case with the chiefs who stood around, on the brows of many of whom Theodore had remarked a cloud gather at the announcement of Bleda's purposes; and they now heard the reply of their great leader with a grim but not insignificant smile. The young Roman could not, it is true, divine the secret causes of all that he saw; but the conversation of Arderic on the preceding evening led him to believe that Bleda was hurrying on in his hopeless schemes of ambition, and that he would soon be plunged into open contention with his far more powerful brother. With all the feelings of a Roman yet strong within him, Theodore could hardly regret the prospect of a struggle which might divide and occupy the enemies of his native country; but still he felt a degree of sorrowful regret that all the high and noble qualities of the barbarian king should not have been enough to win the love, or overawe the ambition, of his inferior brother.

When the messenger of Bleda had departed, Theodore himself was called before the king. The object of Attila was but to give him permission to begin his journey on the following morning; but as this was the first time that the young Roman, whose undaunted bearing had busied the tongue of rumour in the camp, had appeared before the monarch in the presence of the Hunnish chiefs, many an eye was turned to watch his demeanour, some of the leaders looking upon him with jealousy, as having suddenly started into a place in Attila's favour, some gazing with ready admiration upon one who had so early obtained that renown which is dear to every noble heart.

Whatever might be the feelings with which Theodore approached the powerful chief on whom his fate so entirely depended, he would not for an empire have shown before the eyes of the barbarians the slightest sign of fear or awe. Grave and respectful his demeanour certainly was; but when he had advanced before the seat of Attila, and bowed his head as a token of reverence due to his power and station, he raised his eyes full to the dusky countenance of him who spoke, and endured the gaze of those eyes before which so many mighty quailed, without withdrawing his own. When the monarch had concluded his commands, Theodore again bowed his head and withdrew; and though, as he passed, he heard Ellac, the eldest son of Attila, who had by this time returned, say something concerning '*the crafty Roman*,' he suffered not the insulting word to disturb the joy which his approaching journey already bestowed.

Hope, like a kind parent, reaches up the cliff and gathers for us the flowers long ere our own slow childish efforts can attain them; and Theodore was already revelling in joys which were yet afar, in that vague uncertain future. He spent the day in happiness; and after a night given up to waking dreams, far brighter than even the fair magician, Fancy, could have called up in the phantasmagoria of sleep, he rose with the first grey streak of dawn, and set out to realise the visions.

It was a dull and heavy morning, with the white veil of clouds rolled round the summits of the distant mountains, and flying showers passing frequently over the plains; but as the young Roman proceeded, at the head of near two hundred of the Alan horsemen, whom Attila, on the pretence of sending them to their own homes, had given him in fact as a

guard, his heart was too light and joyful to feel or know that the brow of nature was overcast. His eye might roll over the mountains plunged in mists; or over the forests, where the pattering rain was seen falling amidst the autumnal leaves; or over the plain and along the meadows, where a hazy whiteness rested a few feet above the general level: but the mind's eye was in other lands and on other scenes; and, for the time, even his corporeal faculties seemed to correspond with the mental vision alone. It is scarcely too much to say that he knew not the morning was not fine.

Following on the banks of the Tibiscus for a long way, Theodore and his companions sought in vain for fords; for the heavy rain which had fallen during the preceding night had swelled the river, which rushed on in haste, a brown discoloured mass of hurried waters, towards the Danube. Night fell ere they had succeeded, and the early moon burst out and swept the clouds away. Choosing some sandy soil for their night's encampment, Theodore and his own immediate attendants sat round one fire, while the Alans, following the practice of the Huns, lighted several others; and, though the young Roman was again long ere he slept, yet at length pleasant dreams blessed his eyes, and daylight was already pouring on the world when he awoke. It was the bustle of preparation which aroused him, and he found all nearly ready to depart.

Looking round as he was about to spring upon his horse, he missed a face that was seldom absent from his side. 'Where is Cremera?' he demanded of those who stood near.

'He went at day-break,' they replied, 'to see if he could find a ford farther down the river. He said that he would not be long, but he has not yet returned.'

'Then we must trace down the river till we find him,' replied Theodore; and mounting his horse, he led the way slowly along the banks of the Tibiscus. An hour went by, and then another, but Cremera did not appear. The woods which swept over the neighbouring country, and which every here and there approached within a few hundred yards of the river, though not thick, afforded quite sufficient covering to have concealed the Arab, if he had taken his way back to the sleeping place by some of the forest paths; and such, Theodore became convinced, had been the case, as the third hour went by, and the freedman had not rejoined them. Toward the end of that period, however, they found a ford, and halted on the margin in expectation of his coming; for his young master could not help feeling it extraordinary that one so quick and rapid in all his decisions as the Arab was, should not long before have discovered that the whole troop had gone on, and overtaken them as they rode.

As more time passed, and he appeared not, Theodore became uneasy, and the memory of the faithful African's zeal, and affection, and services, came in full stream upon his heart. At length, bidding the Alani cross the ford and wait for him at the other side, he turned back with his little troop of Huns, and rode swiftly along, spreading out his men through the woods on the right, and, as was customary amongst them, keeping up his communication with them by cries of various conventional import.

Thus they had proceeded for more than an hour and a half, though they rode much more quickly than before; and they had nearly reached the spot whence they set forth in the morning, when Theodore heard one of his followers in the wood give the peculiar shout which was understood to express a desire, for all the companions of him who uttered it, to halt. The next instant, the man appeared at the verge of the wood, beckoning eagerly to the young Roman.

Riding up with a sinking heart, Theodore eagerly asked what he had found. The man made no other reply than, 'Come hither! come hither!' with an expression of countenance which did not serve to allay the Roman's apprehensions. Ten steps brought him into a little gap in the wood; and what was his horror to behold the gigantic form of the faithful African stretched out between two trees, with one hand nailed to each, so as to keep him in an erect position.* His head, fallen forward on his chest, showed that life was quite extinct, and a number of arrows left in the body spoke the cruel and painful death which he must have died.

With a heart full of grief and indignation, Theodore approached the body with his companion; but while they gazed upon it, wondering who could have committed so horrible a deed, another of the young Roman's followers came up, galloping through the trees at full speed. Ere he could speak distinctly, however, the cause of his quick approach became evident. Other Hunnish horsemen appeared, whose faces were unknown to the young Roman: men on foot came gliding through the wood, and Theodore, with his two followers, found themselves surrounded by at least a hundred fierce-looking strangers, whose purpose was scarcely doubtful.

They rushed in upon him suddenly and without speaking; and as he drew his sword to take some vengeance at least before he died the same death as the unhappy freedman, one of those on foot sprang upon his horse's back

* Crucifixion, which we have reason to believe one of the most agonising kinds of death, was one of the common punishments amongst the Huns.

behind, and embarrassed his arm by clinging closely to him. He was then overpowered in a moment. His two Hunnish followers made no resistance to the overwhelming force which surrounded them, but only remonstrated loudly and rapidly, threatening the vengeance of Attila. Their captors, however, answered only by a scoff; and Theodore could hear the name of Bleda pronounced as authority sufficient for the act they had committed.

At that name, the prospect of immediate death presented itself more strongly than ever; and though he nerved his mind to bear with unshrinking fortitude the same dreadful lot which had fallen to the unfortunate Cremera; yet even then, in the dark moment of approaching fate, the memory of those he loved—whom he might never see again, and whom he left all alone and unprotected in the wide and perilous world—came thrilling through his heart, inflicting, by anticipation, the worst of all death's pangs. When once he found that he could not resist effectually, he suffered his captors to do with him whatsoever they pleased; but he found, to his surprise, that they did not take him from his horse, contenting themselves with tying his hands and arms tightly behind his back with thick thongs of leather; and it soon became evident, that if their intention still was to put him to death, they would choose another hour.

Hitherto the young Roman had not spoken; but when at length they took the bridle of his horse, and were about to lead him away, he turned his eyes upon the body of Cremera, saying, to one who seemed the leader of the troop, 'Will ye not give him burial, at least?'

'No!' replied the Hun, fiercely. 'No! Did he not dare to raise his hand against our lord and king? No! There shall he stay, till from his bones the vultures and the crows shall have picked away his flesh: the toad, and the lizard, and the snail shall crawl over his feet, while the carrion-eater comes down from the heavens, and takes its daily meal upon his carcase. Such, too, shall be thy fate; but it is first needful that Bleda the king should see thee, that he may devise how to punish thee as thou meritest.'

'I fear not death,' replied Theodore, 'and can bear pain; but of this I am sure, I shall not die unavenged. Attila will avenge me, even of his brother.'

'If he can,' replied the Hun; 'but perchance the day of Attila's power is gone by.'

Theodore replied not, but suffered them to lead him whithersoever they pleased. At first they proceeded slowly, looking to the young Roman from time to time; but seeing that he sat his horse as well as before, although his hands were tied, they soon got into a quicker pace, which increased to a gallop when they reached the open plains. After crossing one of these, they again came to a large tract of wood; and when they issued forth once more, the sun, in setting, was pouring a flood of light upon the blue eastern mountains, towards which their course seemed bent. Theodore thought the features of the scene were familiar to his eye; and, as they rode on, he felt sure that a distant wood, which he saw stretching out into the plain, was that on the verge of which was situated the dwelling of Bleda. Night, however, came on rapidly; and ere they came near the wood, the whole world was involved in darkness.

At length they began to pass amongst the houses, and Theodore became convinced that he had not been mistaken. All was quiet as they rode on, for the early Huns had betaken themselves to their dwellings; and it was only as he passed along before the wide rambling building which formed the dwelling of Bleda that Theodore heard the sounds of mirth and rude revelry proceeding from that apartment which he knew to be the hall of the banquet. He was led along to the farther extremity of the building, and thrust into a chamber which had evidently been destined for a place of confinement. It, like the house, was all of wood, but no windows, except a row of small apertures near the roof, appeared to admit air or light; and across the outside of the door through which the prisoner had entered was cast, as his captors departed, a huge beam of wood, which would have defied the strength of a Hercules to shake it from within.

Theodore was left alone, for the two Huns who had been captured with him, and had been brought there at the same time, were placed in some other chamber, perhaps from a fear that they might assist him in escaping. All was darkness, for neither food nor lamp was given to the prisoner; and, seating himself upon the rude bench which he found at one side of the room, Theodore spent the succeeding hours in momentary anticipation of death, and in thoughts and regrets which added fresh gall to the cup of bitterness.

Few were the sounds which disturbed his painful reveries; for though from time to time the roar of barbarian merriment echoed through the long passages, and found its way even to the lonely chamber in which he was immersed, yet it came faint and softened to his ear, and at length, after rising to a louder pitch than before, suddenly ceased, and all was still. Theodore listened to hear if those sounds would be renewed; but deep silence seemed to reign over all the household, and for two hours everything remained perfectly quiet.

At length a streak of light appeared above and below the door, and a low murmuring sound reached the sharpened ear of the prisoner. 'It is a fit hour for death,' he

thought; and the next moment he heard the heavy beam grate slowly and gently against the walls, as it was removed from across the door. The door itself was opened cautiously, and the deformed head and shoulders of the negro jester, Zercon, were thrust into the room. In one hand he held a lamp, and with the fore-finger of the other raised to his lips seemed to enjoin perfect silence.

He held up the lamp ere he entered fully, and looked round the room with careful attention, as if he expected to see some other tenant besides Theodore. Then, advancing rapidly, he whispered in Greek, 'The Lady Neva knows of your being here; I heard that you were taken, while I was in the hall, where her fierce father was drinking; and as I had found out by her face, when he talked of waylaying you yesterday, how it went with her young heart, I told her all directly, and she is coming to save you; but she sent me first to see if any of the guards remained with you, for the poor buffoon can venture in his folly upon things that the clumsy wise man would spoil if he touched. Hush! I hear her in the passage, or somebody else;' and he advanced and looked out at the door, which he had closed behind him as he had entered.

The next moment he made a sign with his hand—there was a light footfall—the door was pushed farther open, and with an eager step the beautiful daughter of Bleda entered the room, and stood before him she loved. She was very pale, but that might proceed from apprehension; and yet there was a devoted determination in those tender eyes, which told that death itself would have no terrors if it lay in the path to save the young Roman. She also carried a lamp in one hand, but in the other she bore a naked dagger. Ere she spoke a word, she set down the lamp upon the ground, and cut with a rapid hand the thongs which bound the prisoner's arms.

'I knew,' she said at length, 'I knew that the time would come when I should save you. Oh, Theodore! how I have prayed for this hour! But I must not waste it, now it has arrived. Zercon! quick! see why that tardy slave, Ahac, has not brought a horse. He would not betray me, surely. But sooner than that he should deliver the Roman again to death, drive thy dagger into his heart. I bid thee do it, and I will abide what comes!'

The negro hastened to obey; and Neva gazed upon the countenance of him whom she was risking so much to save, with one of those looks of deep, unutterable affection, which the very hopelessness of the passion from which it sprung purified, dignified, sanctified even, in its strong intensity. The next moment, as Theodore was pouring forth his thanks to an ear that seemed scarcely to hear them—so deeply was she occupied with the emotions of her own bosom—the sound of a horse's feet was heard, led gently forward; and a smile of triumphant pleasure played upon Neva's lip.

In another instant, however, it changed, as she thought that horse was to bear him away, perhaps, for ever. The tears rose in her blue eyes, ran shining through the black lashes that fringed them, and fell upon her cheek; and for one moment she hid her face upon the young Roman's bosom, and he pressed her gently, gratefully in his arms, whispering words of comfort and of thanks. But, suddenly raising her head, she turned it away, while her hand still lingered in his, saying, 'Go! go! Tarry not longer. I have saved you—that is enough—I am happy. To know that I have saved you is enough happiness for me through life. Go! go! every moment is precious!'

Theodore raised the hand he held to his lips, pressed upon it one kiss of deep gratitude, dropped it, and quitted the chamber which had been his prison. At the door stood Zercon, who led him quickly forth to a spot where, amongst the grass, so that his feet might not be heard, stood a horse, held by one of the slaves whom Theodore had seen when he was there before.

'I could have wished it had been my own horse,' he said, speaking to Zercon.

'Your own horse will never bear any one more,' replied the negro; 'they slew him within an hour after they had brought him hither.'

Theodore could have wept; but, without reply, he sprang upon the horse, and shook his hand towards the dwelling of Bleda.

'Follow yon star,' continued Zercon, pointing to one near the pole, 'and ere morning thou shalt be among the mountains that overhang the dwelling of Attila.'

'I thank thee,' replied Theodore, speaking to the negro—'I thank thee, my friend: the time may come when I can show thee my gratitude.' Thus saying, he shook the bridle, and urged the horse on at full speed, following exactly the course which had been pointed out to him. Ere morning he beheld the waters of the Mariscus stretching out before him; but knowing that the horses of the Huns possessed, either by natural instinct, or had acquired by constant habit, the power of distinguishing what rivers and what places they could swim across, he rode the beast rapidly to the bank, and then left the bridle upon his neck, in order that he might take to the stream, or not, as he pleased. The horse, however, without any sign of disinclination, ran down the bank, and waded into the water. After pausing for a moment to drink, he advanced still farther, and then, with a sudden plunge, began to swim, though the stream was running somewhat rapidly. The deep

water was of no great extent, and the horse's hoofs soon struck the ground. The bank was soon gained, and, apparently refreshed with the cool wave, the swift horse bore the young Roman rapidly on his way.

The dawn was just breaking when he arrived at the foot of the hills, and by the time he had reached the top, the broad light of day was shining over all the world. He saw, by one of the peaks to the south, that he was several miles farther up in the chain than the spot where he had before passed in the neighbourhood of the two hermits. Pausing to breathe his horse, he looked over the plain behind him, and could see, at the distance of several leagues, what appeared to be a strong body of horsemen, following rapidly on the very track he had taken. There was no time to be lost; and, hurrying on, he reached the plains at the foot of the hill, nor paused again till the flagging powers of his horse obliged him to stop in order to give the animal food and repose.

He could well afford to rest, however; for even if the horsemen he had seen were really in pursuit of him, yet the distance at which they had appeared from the foot of the mountains, and the difficulty of climbing those mountains themselves, promised to afford him at least four hours of open time. His horse fed, and then lay down to rest among the long grass, and Theodore, in the latter respect at least, followed its example, knowing how small an object might be discerned from the tops of the mountains in that wide uncovered plain, and trusting that, while hidden by the grass, his enemies, if they came sooner than he expected, might miss his track, and perhaps turn back disappointed. He kept his eye fixed, however, upon the ridge of the hills; and well it was he did so, for, having taken, perhaps, an easier path than he had done, his enemies did begin to appear upon the summits in less than two hours after he had reached the base.

At first they could scarcely be distinguished from the rocks amidst which they came forth on the tops of the hills; but soon the number of moving objects, which he beheld at one particular point, showed the young Roman that as yet they had followed but too successfully. For a time the pursuers seemed to hesitate whether they should proceed any farther, and he could see them lingering during several minutes, hanging like a dark cloud upon the ridge of the mountain. At length they began evidently to descend, and that moment Theodore sprang upon his feet, roused his horse, which seemed to have fallen asleep, and leaping into the saddle, galloped on towards a wood that lay at the distance of three or four miles before him.

As he came near, he beheld several small huts gathered together; and, approaching them, he resolved to see if he could procure a fresh horse in exchange for the weary one which bore him. The name of Attila obtained what no bribe could have gained. The head of the little tribe, leading out his own horse, placed the rude bridle in Theodore's hand; and, once more hurrying on his way, the young Roman, ere night fell, saw the mountains and the woods that swept round the dwelling of the king, and heard the rushing sound of the near Tibiscus.

It was night when he arrived at the widespread village; but all was peaceful within, and no guard or sentinel impeded his way even to the porticoes of the monarch's lowly abode. As he alighted, and approached the inner gates of the building, he was met by one of Attila's slaves, whom he had seen more than once before, and who now told him that the king had gone to rest.

'He feared that you were slain,' continued the man, 'for many of those who went hence with you but a few days ago returned with speed this day, and declared that you had been put to death. They are now at the dwelling where you were lodged before, and will gladly see you living, for they thought you dead.'

The young Roman took his way to the house he had formerly inhabited; and the unaffected joy displayed by the rude Huns who had been given him as attendants, on seeing him again in life, compensated for some bitter pangs. Attila's slaves brought him provisions and wine, but he was too weary to enjoy food, and, after a short and slight repast, he cast himself down to rest.

The image of his faithful Cremera, however, rose up before his eyes, and for some time banished sleep. His noble horse, too, though less in the scale of regret, was not without its share of painful recollection. 'The two last friends,' he thought, 'who accompanied me from my native home to this barbarian land, have in one day been taken from me, and I am alone—without one being near me who has any memories in common with mine own.' Fatigue at length prevailed, and he slept. Early on the following morning he was roused by a summons to the presence of the king, and at the gate of the palace he beheld a numerous train of horsemen, waiting as if prepared for a journey.

Attila himself was seated beneath the porch, and beside him stood Arderic and another kingly leader, whom Theodore afterwards learned to be Valamir, king of the Ostrogoths, with several other chiefs of inferior power. The brows of all were clouded, with the exception of that of Attila, which wore the same stern, calm aspect that so seldom quitted it.

'Thou hast been impeded on thy way, my son,' said the monarch, slowly, 'one of thy faithful followers slain, and thou thyself carried away to the dwelling of my unwise brother, Bleda; so some who returned hither reported to me yesterday. Did he set thee free, after having, as he thought, sufficiently insulted his brother? Or didst thou escape?'

'I escaped, oh king! during the night,' replied Theodore; but not knowing what might be the conduct of Attila, he refrained from telling how his escape had been accomplished, lest the share which Neva and Zercon had had therein might reach the ears of Bleda. 'I escaped during the night, and have been keenly pursued, even across the mountains.'

Attila rolled his dark eyes round to the faces of all the different leaders near, with a slight compression of the lips, which marked that he was moved more than usual.

'And thy faithful Arab is dead, then; is it not so?' demanded the king.

'Alas! so it is, oh king!' replied Theodore: 'nailed by the two hands to two separate trees, I found him pierced with arrows by the banks of the river, some two hours' journey on this side of the first ford. There any one may see him, for they have denied him even the shelter of the grave.'

Attila folded his arms upon his wide chest, and gazed for a moment upon Theodore in silence: 'Wouldst thou still pursue thy journey,' he asked at length, 'after such misfortunes on the way?'

'If it may be pursued at all with life, I would fain pursue it,' answered Theodore.

'It may be pursued with safety,' said the monarch. 'In thy case, Attila's protection has been twice insulted—it shall not be so a third time. None but a brother dared do what has been done; but even a brother has gone too far. If thou wouldst go on thy way, join, with thy followers, in less than an hour, those warriors who stand around the gate. They will conduct thee by the higher country to the land of thy kindred; and I swear by mine own heart, that those who stay you, going or returning, were it even by a willow wand across your path, I will smite from the face of the earth, and lay their dwellings level with the sand, and sell their wives and children unto slavery. Now make ready quickly, and proceed!'

Theodore failed not to obey; and in as short a space of time as possible, he was once more upon horseback, and on his way towards the west.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE MEETING OF THE PARTED.

ACROSS wide plains, through deep solitudes, amidst dim woods, over gigantic mountains, by the banks of the stream and the torrent and the lake, amongst the occasional ruins left upon the footsteps of ancient civilisation and the scattered villages of barbarian hordes, Theodore once more pursued his way. Every kind of scene but that of the cultivated city met his eye, and every kind of weather that the changeful autumn of a northern land can display accompanied him on his path. The splendid October sunshine, beaming clear and kind upon the earth, like the tempered smile of a father looking in mellow ripeness of years upon his rising offspring; the flitting shadows of the heavy clouds as they swept by over the landscape, resembling the gloomy cares and apprehensions which sometimes cross the brightest moments of enjoyment; the dull misty deluge pouring down from morning until night, without interval or cessation, shutting out all prospects, and promising no brighter time, like the hopeless existence of but too many of the sons of toil; the brief and angry thunder-storm, rending the stoutest trees, like the fierce passing of war or civil contention, all visited him by turns, as he journeyed onwards from the banks of the Tibiscus, till he once more joined the Danube, at a spot where, shrunk to a comparatively insignificant stream, it flowed on between the countries now called Bavaria and Austria.

It was on one of those dim uncertain days when all distant objects are shut out from the sight, that he crossed the river a little above its junction with the Inn, and entered upon the open country of Bavaria. Nothing was to be seen but the flat plain which stretches onward along the banks of the Inn; and when, after halting for the night amidst some rude huts, where the people seemed to speak the language of the Goths, he recommenced his journey on the following morning, the same dull cheerless prospect was all that presented itself, stretched upon the grey background of broad unvaried cloud. His companions had now been reduced to twenty, by the larger party having left him as soon as he was free from danger; and none but his own peculiar attendants accompanied him, except three officers of the household of Attila, sent with authority from that mighty and far-feared monarch to demand a free passage for the young Roman through whatever countries he might have to traverse. It was one of these officers—who took care to show all kindly reverence towards a youth who stood so high in the favour of the king—that now, pointing forward to a little stream which flowed on to join the Inn, informed the young Roman that along its banks was settled the nation which he came to seek.

'And is this,' thought Theodore, 'this bleak wilderness the destined habitation of my Ildica, nurtured in the lap of ease and civilisation? Is this flat unmeaning plain,

bounded by a grey cloud, all that is to greet her eyes, after the splendours of the Adriatic shore, and the marvellous beauty of Salona?' And with a deep sigh he thought of the regretted past.

Ere he had ridden on a quarter of an hour longer, however, a light wind sprung up; and rising, like a curtain drawn slowly up from before some picture of surpassing beauty, the veil of clouds was lifted to the south, displaying as it rose, robed in the magic purple of the mountain air, the wild but splendid scenery of the Bavarian Tyrol.

A few moments more brought the young Roman to a congregation of small wooden houses, not far from the first gentle slopes that served to blend the plain with the highlands. A fair girl, with whose face Theodore felt as if he could claim kindred, paused, with a basket of milk in her hand, to gaze upon the troop of horsemen who were passing by, but without any sign of fear. Theodore asked her some question concerning the road, and she replied lightly and gaily, with the milkmaid's careless glee, speaking the pure Alan tongue, in accents that made the young Roman's heart thrill again to hear. He rode gladly on his way, assured by those tones that he was at length once more in the same land with her he loved. That land, he knew, was of no very great extent, and therefore he had not any cause to anticipate a long and painful search; but still the eager thirst with which young affection pants towards its object, made him anxious not to lose a single moment in any unnecessary delay; and he determined, as they wound onward towards the little capital of the mountain tribe, to inquire, wherever he came, for the dwelling of the Roman family, whose arrival in the land, he doubted not, had excited no small rumour and attention.

There remained yet two hours to sunset, when, passing through some gentle hills, Theodore suddenly found himself on the banks of a small but beautiful lake, surrounded on three sides by the mountains. The shore, at the spot where he stood, was low and sandy, with here and there a fringe of long reeds, mingling the water with the land, but on all the other sides the banks were more abrupt. From the lake up to the very sky, on those three sides stretched the upland, rising in different ranges, like Titan steps whereby to scale the heavens, but divided at different angles by intervening valleys, up which was seen the long blue perspective of interminable hills beyond. The first step of that mountain throne, carpeted as if with green velvet, by pastures still unembrowned and rich, was covered with sheep and cattle feeding in peace. Beyond that appeared a range, clothed with glowing woods of oak, and elm, and beech, filled with the more timid and gentle inhabitants of the sylvan world; while above, tenanted by the wolf, the fox, and other beasts of prey, stretched wide the region of the pine and fir; and, towering over all, grey, cold, and awful, rose the peaks of primeval granite, with nothing but the proud eagle soaring between them and heaven. Below, the lake, unruffled by a breeze, lay calm and still, offering a mirror to the beauty of the scene, where every line of picturesque loveliness was reflected without a change, and every hue of all the varied colouring around, from the rich brown of the autumnal woods, to the purple of the distant mountains and the floods of amber and of rose that evening was pouring along the glowing sky.

Upon the lower range of hills many a wooden cottage, neat and clean, was to be seen; and several villages, peeping from the first woods, varied the scene with the pleasant aspect of intelligent life; and as, winding round the left shore, the young Roman and his companions advanced towards a spot at the other end of the lake where they proposed to pass the night, a thousand new beauties opened out upon their sight. Theodore gazed around, thinking, that here indeed he could spend his days in peace; and, perhaps, he might envy the shepherd boys that looked down upon him from low flat-topped hills, under which he passed, or the women and girls, who, sitting by the cattle at pasture, roused themselves for a moment from their pleasant idleness to mark the troop of horsemen passing by.

At length, upon the verge of a smooth meadow which covered the summit of a steep green hill at the foot of the higher mountains —jutting out, in the form of a small promontory above the road he was pursuing, with the green edge cutting sharp upon the blue mountain air beyond—he beheld a group of people gathered together, apparently enjoying the evening sunshine. Neither sheep nor cattle were near; and though the dark lines of the figures, diminished by distance, were all that Theodore could see as they stood on the clear bright back-ground, yet in those very lines, and in the graceful attitudes which the figures assumed as they stood or sat, there was something so Grecian and classical, so unlike the forms offered by a group of barbarians, that the heart of the young Roman felt a thrill of hope which made it beat high.

Suddenly reining in his horse, he stopped to gaze; the glad hope grew into more joyful certainty; and, without farther thought or hesitation, carried away by feelings which refused control, he urged his horse at the gallop up the steep side of the hill, nor paused, even for a moment, till he had reached

the summit. The Huns gazed with surprise from below, and beheld him, when he had arrived at the top, spring from his horse in the midst of the group, which had caught his attention, and with many an embrace and many a speaking gesture, receive his welcome to the bosom of ancient affection.

'He has found his home!' they said to one another, as they saw his reception; and, winding round by a more secure path, they followed up to the summit of the hill, perceiving, as they ascended, a number of beautiful mountain dwellings congregated in the gorge of a ravine behind.

Oh who can tell what were in the meantime the emotions which agitated the group above! To Theodoré it was the fruition of a long cherished hope. He held his Ildica in his arms, he pressed her to his heart, he saw those dark and lustrous eyes, swimming in the light of love's delicious tears, gaze at him with the full passionate earnestness of unimpaired affection; he tasted once more the breath of those sweet lips, he felt once more the thrilling touch of that soft hand. She was paler than when he had left her, but in her countenance there was—or seemed in his eyes to be—a crowning charm gained since he last had seen it. There was in its expression a depth of feeling, an intensity of thought, which, though softened and sweetened by the most womanly tenderness and youthful innocence which human heart ever possessed, added much to the transcendent beauty that memory had so often recalled. In her form, too, there had been a slight change, which had rendered the symmetry perfect without brushing away one girlish grace. Flavia, too, had a part in his glad feelings, as with the full measure of maternal tenderness she held him in her arms, and blessed the day which gave him back to those who loved him. Eudochia, also, over whose head the passing months had fled, maturing her youthful beauty, clung round her brother, and with eyes of joyful welcome gazed silently up in his face.

Ammian was not there: gone, they said, to hunt the izzard and wild goat amongst the highest peaks of the mountain; but the slaves and freedmen who had followed Flavia still, through every change of fortune drew closer, round, and with smiling lips and sparkling eyes greeted the young Roman on his return amongst them. It was not long ere his attendants joined him; and as there was much to be inquired and much to be told on all parts, Flavia speedily led the way to the dwelling which she had obtained in the land of the Alani; and Theodore, with Ildica's hand clasped in his, and Eudochia hanging to his arm, followed to the little group of houses which filled the gorge above.

Oh what a change from the palace of Diocletian! the marble columns, the resplendent walls, the sculptured friezes, the rich wrought capitals! All was of woodwork, neat, clean, and picturesque; spacious withal, and convenient, though simple and unassuming. Within, Flavia, and her children and attendants, had laboured hard to give it the appearance of a Roman dwelling, trying by the presence of old accustomed objects to cheat memory and banish some of her sad train of regrets; nor had they been unsuccessful in producing the appearance they desired, for all that they had brought from Salona, and which, under the safe escort of the Huns, had been conveyed from the neighbourhood of Margus thither, enabled them to give an air of Roman splendour to the interior of their rude habitation.

In the village Theodore's attendants found an abode, while he himself, once more in the midst of all he now loved on earth, if we except Ammian, sat down to the evening meal, and listened eagerly to the details of everything that had occurred to Flavia and her family since he had parted with them on the verge of the barbarian territory. Their journey had been long and fatiguing, the matron said, but safe and uninterrupted, and their reception amongst the simple mountaineers had been kind and tender. The choice of a dwelling had been left to themselves; and though the capital of the tribe was situated in the valley of the Inn, they had fixed upon the spot where they now were for their abode, as one less subject to the passage of strangers, or to the inroads of inimical neighbours.

The most important part of the tale, however, was to come: scarcely a month ere Theodore had arrived, ambassadors from Valentinian had presented themselves at the court of the king of the Alani, and Flavia and her family had held themselves for a time in even deeper retirement than before; but to their surprise, one morning the envoys appeared at their dwelling by the lake, and the Roman lady found, with no slight astonishment, that Valentinian was already aware of her residence amongst the Alani. The mission of the ambassadors to the barbarian chief was one of small import, but to Flavia they bore a message from the emperor of unwonted gentleness. He invited her to fix her abode in the western empire; promised her protection against all her enemies, and full justice in regard to all her claims; nor could she doubt from the whole tenor of his message that, with the usual enmity of rival power, even when lodged in kindred hands, whoever was looked upon as an enemy by Theodosius was regarded as a friend by Valentinian. Flavia, however without absolutely refusing to accept the fair offers of the emperor, had assigned as a

motive for delaying to reply, that she expected daily to receive tidings from the son of Paulinus.

Theodore mused at these tidings; but Eudochia, who with childish thoughtlessness looked upon all that happened to themselves as of very little import whenever it was over, now pressed eagerly to hear the adventures of her brother since they had parted, and Ildica also, with a deeper interest than common curiosity, looked up in his face with eyes that seemed to say, 'I have waited long, beloved, that you might be satisfied first, but, oh, make me a sharer now in all that has occurred to one far dearer than myself.'

Theodore needed no entreaty, but began his story, and with minute detail related all that had occurred to him during the last few months. Was there any part of that history which he did not tell, any of the events that had chequered his fate, which he omitted in his narration? There were! A feeling of tenderness, of interest, of gratitude, kept him silent upon some points of the history of Bleda's daughter. He spoke of Neva, indeed; he told how she had nursed him in sickness, and how she had delivered him from captivity; but he could not, and he did not, tell, while many an ear was listening, that she had bestowed the first love of her young heart upon one who could not return it.

Flavia hearkened to the tale, and at that part of it which related to Bleda's daughter, her eyelids fell a little over her eyes. It was not that she doubted Theodore, for there was a simplicity and candour in all he said which admitted no suspicion; but she deemed how it was, and for the sake of the poor girl she was grieved that it should be so. Ildica, possessed but by one feeling, suspected and divined nothing; her only comment was, as she heard of his danger and escape, 'Oh, why was it not I, to whom the means of saving you were given?'

'Thank God, my Ildica,' replied Theodore, 'that you were far from such scenes and such dangers.' But as he was proceeding to conclude his tale, there were quick steps heard without, and the voice of Ammian singing gaily, as he returned successful from his mountain sport.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE INTERVAL OF HAPPINESS.

HITHERTO we have given nearly a connected narrative; but now it may become necessary to proceed sometimes in detached scenes, leaving the mind of the reader to fill up the obvious chain of intervening facts.

Theodore and Ildica sat alone by the banks of the lake, with their eyes fixed upon the rippling waters that came whispering up nearly to their feet; and they gained, without knowing it, a tone of calm repose, in the midst of their hearts' thrilling enjoyment, from the tranquillity of the scene around, and the bright untroubled softness of a fine autumn day. If, when they met on the preceding evening, Theodore had been moved by joy, such as his heart had never known before, Ildica's had been still more agitated, for delight had been carried to its fullest height by surprise. Theodore had come thither with expectation and hope as the harbingers of gratification; but to Ildica, the joy of his coming had burst suddenly forth, like the May-day sun, when he scatters the clouds of morning from his path. Neither, however, the youth nor the maiden had been able to pause, and—if I may use so strange a term—*enjoy their joy*, during the first evening after his arrival. The mind of each had been full of whirling images of pleasure, but with forms scarcely definite. Now, however, as they sat by the side of that calm lake, amidst those glorious mountains, with a sky clear, but not burning, above their heads, and the fresh stillness of the early morning pervading all the air, the solemn tranquillity of the scene sunk into their souls, and bade their mutual thoughts flow on in peace.

The history of all external events which had befallen them had been told, it is true, by Flavia and Theodore, and many a little trait had been added by Eudochia, Ammian, and Ildica herself; but still she and her lover had both a long history to tell of thoughts and feelings, hopes and fears, of far deeper interest to each other than things that might seem of greater importance. Ildica towards Theodore had no thought concealed. No idle fear of lessening the value of her love by displaying it, put an unnatural bar upon the pure feelings of her heart: not a doubt of his generous construction of all that she said fettered her words, or embarrassed the expression of her thoughts; and she poured forth, without fear or hesitation, the tale of all she had felt since she left him in the hands of the Huns; how she had wept, and how she had feared; how she had daily looked for some tidings from him, or some change in her own fate; and how she had consoled herself with the remembrance of the extraordinary power he seemed to have obtained over the barbarian king.

The telling of that tale, now that the dangers were over and the fears gone by, was in itself a happiness; and, mingled with many a look of love and accent of affection, and many a tender caress, Ildica's narrative of all that she had felt proceeded, till, in the end, she had to relate how, on the very preceding night, while sitting on the little promontory with Eudochia and her mother and the slaves, there

had been something in the situation, which—though unlike in all the features of the landscape, though the air was colder, and the mountains nearer, and the sky of a paler hue—which recalled the lovely Dalmatian shore to her mind: and how, in the magic glass of memory had risen up the mound of cypresses and the bay of Salona, and the glorious sunset, and all the objects and all the feelings of that well-remembered evening when her lover had last returned from the city of the emperors; and how, at those thoughts, the unbidden tears were rising even to overflowing in her eyes, when she saw a horseman suddenly gallop up the hill, and wild hopes and joyful presentiments had rushed through her heart, and taken from her all power of speech or motion, till she was once more clasped in his arms.

Theodore, too, had his tale to tell; and now, to the ear of her he loved, it was not less full or less candid than her own had been. He gave her a picture of all his thoughts in every situation through which he had passed, and her own unconscious questions soon brought the narrative towards Neva. But Theodore felt that he could trust in Ildica, and he told her all; and, with his arm circling her waist, he pressed her more tenderly, more closely, to his bosom, while he spoke of the love of another, as if he sought thereby to express how much more dear she had become to his heart under every change and every circumstance.

Neither did he do the daughter of the barbarian chief the injustice of breathing the tale of her unhappy love, without adding every pure and noble trait which had shone out in her conduct; and Ildica, who had listened with a beating heart, but not a doubting mind, pressed her eyes, in which were some tears, upon Theodore's bosom, saying, 'Poor girl, I am sorry for her! I wonder not at her loving you, Theodore. It is but too natural she should; and oh, I am sure that her love for one so much above any being that she ever saw before, will last, unhappily for herself, through all her life. She will compare every one with you, and every one will fall short. I am sorry for her, beloved: and yet, Theodore, yet I could not share your love with any one; I could not part with the smallest portion of that treasure for a world. See, how selfish and miserly I have become!'

'None can ever take the slighest portion from thee, my Ildica,' replied Theodore: 'from infancy to death there shall be but one image which shall fill my heart. But to do poor Neva justice, she seeks not to rob my Ildica of that which is Ildica's own. She would not share in a heart that is given to another, Ildica, even if she could; and as, from all that has passed, from her father's hatred towards me, and the injuries he has done me, it is impossible that Neva and I should ever meet again, I trust that she will forget feelings which were suddenly raised, checked almost in their birth, and have no food on which to feed and prolong their existence—I trust she will forget——'

'Never, Theodore! never!' cried Ildica; 'such feelings are not to be forgotten. She will see none like you; but even if she did, she would fancy none she saw your equal. The memory of having saved you from death, too, will perpetuate her love—ay, the memory of that action, and the memory of her love, will go down together with her to the tomb, embalming and preserving each other.'

'I trust not, my Ildica, I trust not,' he replied.

'Oh, Theodore,' she answered, 'were I absent from you for long years, separated from you even by impassable barriers, would you love me less? could you forget our love?'

'No, certainly not,' replied Theodore; 'but our love is mutual, and full of mutual hopes. Her love is hopeless and unreturned; and I trust she will forget it.'

'Such may be the case with man,' answered Ildica. 'Hopeless and unreturned, his love may, perhaps, seek another object. Woman loves but once, and never forgets, my Theodore. My heart tells it me even now; and though in such things I have, of course, but little skill, yet I feel and know that time, absence, despair itself, could never make me forget my love for thee. The time must come when remembrance shall be extinguished in the grave, and the fine lines, traced by the diamond style of love on the tablets of the spirit, may be hidden for a while beneath the dust of the tomb; but to that cold dwelling-house shall the unfaded recollection go down with me; and when I waken again from the sleep of death, the memory of my love shall waken with me—I feel—I know it will;' and as she spoke, she raised her eyes to heaven, while the rays of the morning light danced in their liquid lustre, as if they, too, were of kindred with the sky.

Theodore pressed her to his heart, and long and sweet was the communion that followed; but we cannot, we will not, farther dwell upon things that those who have loved truly will understand without our telling, and that those who have never so loved cannot comprehend at all. Let them be sacred! those holy feelings of the pure and high-toned heart; those sweet, ennobling emotions of the unpolluted soul. Let them be sacred! those sensations, intense yet timid, pure and unalloyable as the diamond, as firm, as bright, as unspotted; but which, like a precious jewel that baser minds would ever fain take from us, are wisely concealed by those who

possess them from the gaze of the low and the unfeeling. We seek not to display—we would not if we could—all the finer shades, the tenderer emotions of the love of Theodore and Ildica. We have raised the veil enough to show how they did love, and we will raise it no farther.

The days of his stay passed in visions of happiness to Ildica and himself, a long dreamy lapse of exquisite delight. Beyond each other, and the few dear beings around them, what was the world to them? The limits of that valley were the limits of their thoughts; and, whether they sailed on the calm bosom of the lake, or climbed the giant mountains round about, or wandered through the rustling woods, or sat upon the shore and watched the tiny billows of that miniature sea, the thoughts of the two lovers were only of each other, though the lovely scene, mountain, and stream, and woods, and lakes, and meadows, mingled insensibly with their own dream of happiness, heightened the colouring of their hopes, and, in return, received a brighter hue itself. Sweet, oh, how sweet! were the hours, and yet how rapidly they flew; till at length, when they rose one morning and gazed forth, a wreath of snow was seen hanging upon the peaks of the mountains, not alone upon those higher summits, on whose everlasting ice the summer sun shone vainly through his longest, brightest hours, but on those lower hills which the day before had risen up in the brown veil of the autumnal forest or the green covering of grass, or the grey nakedness of the native stone. It was the signal for Theodore to depart; and then came the hours, ere he set out, of melancholy and of gloom.

Those hours, however, were broken by many a long and anxious consultation. The offered hospitality and protection of Valentinian had yet to be considered, for it was a proposal which, if not accepted at once, both Theodore and Flavia judged might prove of great utility at an after period. No one could tell, either what changes might take place in the positions of the barbarian nations, or what might be the final result of the victories and successes of Attila himself. Where he might next turn his arms was a question which none even of his own court could solve; and while it was evident to all, that a victorious and devastating excursion against the eastern empire was by no means the ulterior purpose of his powerful and ambitious mind, yet no one could divine what was the end proposed, or whither the pursuit might lead. Under these circumstances, to have a place of refuge open against the storm of war was always a blessing; and Theodore strongly counselled Flavia to despatch messengers to the emperor, charged with thanks, and such presents as circumstances permitted her to send; not exactly accepting the offer of asylum he had made, but expressing a purpose of taking advantage thereof at no very distant period.

'Were you to go thither, even next year,' Theodore observed, while speaking on the subject with Flavia alone, 'Ammian would be some protection to you all; for I remark that his bold spirit and his mountain sports are every day giving greater and greater vigour to his limbs, and his frame is towering up towards manhood. A year will do much in such pastimes as these, while the free and wild simplicity of the barbarian habits will secure him against the weak and effeminate manners of Rome; and, at the same time, it were but right and necessary that both he and Eudochia should receive that civilised education which can be obtained nowhere but in the empire.'

'Alas! my son,' replied Flavia, 'I fear that it will be long ere Ammian can give us that protection which thou mightest do; for though courageous to a fault, and resolute, yet there is a wild and heedless spirit in his breast, which often prevents his nobler qualities from acting as they might. His heart is kind and generous, his mind upright and noble; but in the exuberance of his youthful daring, and the wanderings of a wild imagination, he forgets too often, Theodore, that there is such a thing as danger to himself or others. He wants prudence, he wants consideration, he wants that calm presence of mind which sees under all circumstances that which is best to do, and is ever ready to do it.'

'But, my mother, he is yet but a boy,' replied Theodore: 'time will give prudence, experience will give judgment, and age will tame quickly the wildest and most wandering fancy. At all events, I only desire that you should have a refuge prepared. Doubtless—both because this mighty barbarian does really, I believe, regard me with affection, and because he has been taught to imagine that there is some mysterious connection between his fate and mine:—doubtless, I say, he will allow me from time to time to renew the visit he has now permitted: at all events, I will find means to send, both to give you my tidings and to gain news from you. If there be danger, I will let you know, and be ready ever, upon but a short warning, to fly to the court of Valentinian. As I go hence, I shall visit the capital of the Alani by the banks of the Inn; for the kindred that I have amongst them might think it strange and wrong, were I to pass through the land without seeing them; and when there, of course I will do all I can to insure that the refuge which you have here received shall be as safe, as peaceful, and as happy, as it can be made. There is much in the ties of blood, even

between a Roman and barbarian, and I think that my requests will find favour amongst the Alani.'

Theodore would fain have lingered and protracted the hours; for although he knew that he soon must go, and the thought of parting sadly embittered even the present, yet around Ildica there was to him an atmosphere of light and happiness, which banished all that was dark and gloomy from his heart. But he had made a promise to Attila, and with Theodore a promise was inviolable. Ildica, too, would fain have detained him, would have fain drunk slowly out the last sweet drops of the cup of happiness which had been offered to her lip: they were but the dregs, it is true, and bitter was mixed with them, but yet the taste of joy remained; and if she could not have it pure and unalloyed, she yet lingered over the last portion, however sadly mingled. But Theodore had given a promise; and Theodore's unstained integrity, and unvarying truth, were as dear to Ildica as to himself—were dearer, far dearer, than any personal enjoyment. She would not have him forfeit his word to Attila, in order to remain with her for all that the world could give; and she herself bade him go, whenever she learned that he had barely time to accomplish his journey by the path that it was necessary for him to follow. They parted—not now, however, as when last they parted; for then before them had stretched out nothing but one vague and indefinite expanse—the grey cloud of the future! on which even the eye of fancy could scarcely trace one likely form, through which the star of hope itself shone faint and powerless. Now, after all those fearful scenes, and that dreadful separation—scenes and circumstances, which had benumbed their feelings, and, like some crashing wound, which by its very severity deprives the sufferer of his sense of pain, had left them bewildered and almost unconscious, till time had shown them the deprivation they had undergone.—Now they had met again; hopes that they had scarcely dared to entertain, had been realised ere the heart grew weary with delay. They had known a longer and more tranquil period of happiness than they had ever tasted since first the mutual love of their young hearts had been spoken to each other; and hope, the sweet sophist, skilful in turning to her purpose all things that befall, drew arguments from past joy in order to prove her promises for the future true.

They parted then: Ildica declared that she wished him to go, and Theodore strengthened himself in the remembrance of his promise. Yet, nevertheless, let no one think that their parting was not bitter: Theodore struggled even against a sigh; and over the cheeks of Ildica rolled no tear, though on the dark long lashes that fringed her eyelids would sparkle like a crushed diamond the irrepressible dew of grief. Yet, nevertheless, let no one think the parting is ever less than bitter, when, even in the brightest day of youth, two hearts united by the great master bond which God assigned to man to bind him in the grievous pilgrimage of life to one chosen from all his kind, are separated from one another for long indefinite hours, with loneliness of feeling and the dim uncertainty of human fate hanging over them like a dark cloud. Who shall say, when thus they part, that they shall ever meet again? Who shall say with what dark barrier the mighty hand of destiny may not close the way? whether death or misfortune, or interminable difficulty, may not cut short hope, or weary out the spirit in the bondage of circumstance, till expectation is vain of re-union on this side the tomb?

They parted firmly: but such partings are ever bitter; and when Theodore was gone, Ildica wept for long hours in silence; while he, as he rode on, beheld nothing of all that surrounded him; for the soul was then in the secret chamber of the heart communing sternly with her own grief.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE RETRIBUTION.

SHIFT we the scene, and return to the kingdom of Attila! It was the fourth day after Theodore had left the country of the Huns for that sweet distant land where happiness, as we have seen, awaited him, and a bright gleam of sunshine was destined to chequer his dark fate, when at a short distance from the bank of the Tibiscus, two barbarians, who had left their horses with their followers by the stream, walked slowly on amongst the trees, wading through the long grass and tangled bushes. At length, suddenly, from a spot before them, came the flapping of heavy wings, and a hoarse arid scream from many a foul beak, while five or six large vultures rose up crashing through the branches above, and leaving open to the sight all that remained of the unfortunate Arab, Cremera. From some cause, a nail which had fixed one of the hands had fallen out, and the skeleton, for to such a thing was the corpse now nearly reduced, hung by the other palm; but two arrows were still seen hanging amidst the fleshless ribs, and telling the manner of the freedman's death.

'Lo!' said the shorter of the two strangers —'Lo! I have now seen it with mine own eyes!—And this man's crime was but that he had obeyed my commands, and saved the life of the man that I loved! Shall this be suffered, Arderic? Shall it last another hour to ring in the ears of my people, to sound

into their inmost hearts, that Attila avenges not his own, that Attila cannot protect those who perform his bidding? Think you it was really Bleda's doing?'

'Doubt it not, oh king!' answered Arderic. 'Was not the Roman carried to his village? Would not death have been the stranger's portion, too, had he not escaped? Some one bore thy brother the tidings of the youth's journey and they waylaid him, to cut the thread of life, on which they fancied thine depended.'

'Ay! It is even so!' answered Attila. 'Therein is it, that the Roman sinned in their eyes. But they shall find that I can rid me of mine enemies and avenge my friends! To horse, Arderic! we will to our horses quick. The cup of vengeance is full and flowing over. He whom no warning could deter shall drink it to the dregs. The leaders we ordered must by this time have crossed the mountains.'

'They must have done so, oh Attila!' replied the king of the Gepidæ, 'but what is thy will to do now? Thou wilt not surely ravage a part of thine own people's lands; or by waging war against thy brother, give new hearts to the pale Romans?'

Attila stopped as he was advancing, and fixed his dark eyes full upon the countenance of Arderic. 'Hast thou known me so long,' he said, 'and canst not yet guess what Attila will do? Am I not king over this man also, to punish him for his evil deeds, when they are directed against myself. No, no! I will not ravage mine own land, nor slay mine own people. But the son of Paulinus will I protect, and even yon freedman will I avenge; and I will crush the worm that raises its head against me, even though it call me brother. Arderic, dost thou not know what I will do? Bleda and I are no more for the same earth: I have borne with him long, but I bear with him no longer, and he dies! now thou understandest!' and with a quick firm pace, every footfall of which seemed to crush the earth it trod upon, he returned to the spot where the horses had been left.

About five hundred horsemen waited him there, and at their head, Attila took his way towards the east. After two hours' riding, some three thousand more joined him on the road; and at the end of two hours more he paused, and sent messengers in different directions to chieftains whom he named. Night fell, and with the first star of evening the monarch resumed his way.

The autumn moon rose large and full, pouring over the wide plain in which the dwelling of Bleda was placed, with a yellow tranquil light: the voice of nature was all still; and not a sound was head but the sighing of the wind through the branches, or the falling of a withered leaf amidst those that had gone down before it. A shooting star traversed the blue fields above, outshining, for the brief moment of its being, the moon herself, and then ending in emptiness. A heavy bird of night glanced across the moonlight, and with a faint scream disappeared.

It was about midnight, and then from the neighbouring wood came forth, in dead deep silence, troop after troop of shadowy forms; and leaving the village on one side, they drew a circle, fatal and sure as the unerring bowstring of a kindred race, around the dwelling of Bleda. They were all now on foot; and when they had reached the distance of about two hundred yards from the building, the circle was complete, and they paused.

'Now, Onegisus!' said Attila, 'what hast thou to tell of the inquiries thou hast made. Speak, and if thou hast aught to say which should induce the king to spare his kindred blood, I will take thee to my heart and give thee kingdoms! Speak!' and he clasped his hands together, and wrung the sinewy fingers hard, under emotions that even his iron soul could not restrain.

'Alas! oh king!' replied Onegisus, 'I have nought to say, which may mitigate thy wrath. I had hoped that it would be otherwise; but I find—and I must speak truth unto the king—that even across the mountains the followers of thy brother pursued the Roman youth, and ravaged a village, killing several and driving away the herds of all, because they lent the son of Paulinus a horse to fly when he demanded it in thy name. Their dwellings are in the dust, and their blood stains the grass, and the widows and the children cry to Attila for vengeance.'

'They shall have it!' replied Attila. 'Let those appointed follow me!' and he advanced to the portico of Bleda's house.

The chief door opened at once to the monarch's hand—'And can treason and treachery sleep so securely?' demanded Attila in a sad tone, as he turned through the first passage of the noiseless dwelling to the large hall in which banquets were usually held. It still smelt strong of the feast; and the monarch paused in the midst, folding his arms upon his chest, and gazing bitterly upon the ground.

'Uldric,' he said at length, 'Uldric, where art thou;'

A man of powerful frame, and countenance more than usually ferocious, advanced before the king, saying, 'I am here, oh Attila! and ready.'

'Is thy sword sharp, and thy heart strong?' demanded Attila. The chief bent his head in token of assent, and the monarch went on: 'Go, then,' he said, 'and do the deed which none but a noble and brave hand should do!

But slay him not in his sleep, for that would seem as if thou wert a murderer, and he a coward afraid to die. Wake him! Tell him his doom! Tell him the cause! Say he was warned, and would not hear; and that the cup has overflowed! Arderic, do thou see it done! Take warriors enough with thee that there be no resistance. Go! go! Yet stay!' continued Attila: 'Stay! Oh ye gods! why have ye put this upon me? Is there none here, who can speak a word in favour of my brother? none who can say aught to stay the anger of the king? All silent?—Go, then! go, Arderic! It is time that it were done.'

Attila waved his hand, then, bending down his eyes again, he remained motionless in the midst of those who stayed with him. But the only moment of indecision that he had ever shown throughout his life had passed away; and, as the moonlight streamed on his dark countenance, no trait of wavering doubt could there be seen. All was firm and calm, though stern and gloomy; and the knitted brow, the compressed lip, the clenched hand, told that there were pangs, but no hesitation within.

The last of those sent upon the mission of death quitted the hall, and with steps which were scarce heard even by waking ears, they went upon their errand. A minute elapsed, and then there came a murmur of voices, and then two or three loud shrieks from a woman's voice mingled with sobbing, prayers, and sad entreaties;—then a dead heavy fall—and then the tones of lamentation. Distant sounds succeeded, and the noise of steps in various parts of the building; cries of grief and terror followed, and some signs of contention were distinguished.

'Bid them shed no more blood!' said Attila, turning to one who stood near: 'Cut off the head, but mangle not the body!'

Almost as he spoke, however, a slave rushed in with a lighted torch of pine in one hand, and a drawn sword in the other; but when the light glared upon Attila, he stood suddenly motionless before the king, as if petrified with fear and astonishment. 'Oh king, they have slain thy brother!' he cried at length,

'It is well!' answered Attila: 'get thee on one side, so shall no harm befall thee.' The next instant there came the sound of footsteps running quickly; and Neva, with her hair dishevelled, and her feet uncovered, ran into the hall, and cast herself at the feet of Attila.

'Oh, spare him! spare him!' she cried; 'spare him, for the memory of thy father! Spare him for the remembered days of infancy! Spare him, because of his weakness, and thy strength! Pour not out thy kindred blood upon the dust! Remember that thou wert a brother ere thou wert a king! Spare him; forgive him if he have offended thee!—But it cannot be! They have lied unto me; thou canst not seek thy brother's life! Thou wouldst never slay him who has slept in the same cradle, eaten the same food, and stood by thy side in battle!—Yet what dost thou here? Oh, spare him! spare him!' and she clasped the knees of the dark monarch in the agony of apprehension.

Others had followed her, women and children and slaves; and at nearly the same time, the chieftain called Uldric stood in the doorway, and held up before the eyes of Attila a naked sword, along the blade of which a drop or two of a dark red hue was seen to trickle in the torch-light.

'Maiden!' said Attila, laying his hand on Neva's head, 'cease thine entreaties; they are now vain. Yet have not I done this thing. His own hand it was that pulled the ruin on his head. He it was that cast himself upon my sword, knowing that it was drawn, and that the hand was firm that held it. Weep, if thou wilt! Go to thy chamber and weep! it is the right and the weakness of woman. Go! but entreat no longer; thou hast none now to save!'

She heard not, or heeded not his words, but still clasped his knees, and with wild looks and streaming eyes, she poured forth her supplications. They were interrupted, however, by her mother's voice, who passed through the crowd like a spectre, and with spots of blood upon her garments stood before the king. 'Ask him not to spare, my child,' she said in a voice as calm as death; 'ask him not to spare! He knows no mercy! Ask him rather to give us our own doom quickly. Thy father is dead already; why should we be left alive? Or is it thy will, oh king, that we be sold as slaves? We are ready; but we would rather die, if the choice were left to such as us. We are but thy brother Bleda's widow and children, and therefore have no claim upon the conqueror of the world; no, not even to choose between death and bondage. He that spared not his own brother will not spare the women and the babes.'

'Woman, I did spare him!' answered Attila, solemnly: 'three times did I spare, when any other man on earth, had he been monarch or slave, had died for so offending Attila. Woman, I spared him so long as his deeds affected but myself; but when he forgot all law and justice to my people, when he made ready the spear and sword to raise up contention in the land, when he slew the innocent and the noble, Attila forgot he had a brother. Neither bondage nor death await thee and thy children; thy husband's crimes have not affected thee; honour, and wealth, and peaceful possession of all that he possessed shall be thine; thy children shall be as my children, and I will defend them against their enemies. Attila sought not his brother's

wealth; he sought but to do justice, and justice has been done. Take them hence, Arderic! take them hence! she is privileged to reproach and murmur; but Attila would not that his ear should have any words that might offend him. Take them hence!'

They were removed without resistance; and after pausing for a moment in thought, Attila demanded of some of those who had been present at his brother's death, 'What men have ye found in the house?'

'But few,' was the reply; 'and they were slaves.'

'Was the deformed negro, Zercon, amongst them?' asked the monarch again.

'No,' replied the Hun to whom he spoke; 'we found him not.'

'Let him be sought,' said Attila, sternly. 'He it was, he it must have been, who betrayed to Bleda the young Roman's journey. Accursed be all they who supply to kings the means of gratifying bad desires! Let him be sought, and when found, scourge him from hence to Margus, and give him up to the chief, whom they call bishop of that town. I promised him to love, defend, avenge his nephew; and I would that he should know how I keep my word. Onegisus, thou shalt remain here. Keep the land in peace; assuage the grief that thou findest; and see that no evil spirit rise amongst the tribes, to call for the hand of Attila, and divide the power of the Huns. Arderic,' he continued, turning to the king of the Gepidæ, 'I could wish, too, that messengers were sent to meet the son of Paulinus, as he returns from the banks of the Juvavus: let them be despatched, and tell him to return by Margus. That good priest of the new God of the Christians will see him joyfully, as this matter may have reached his ears, and he may be fearful for his nephew's safety. I would,' he added, laying his hand upon the sleeve of Arderic's tunic, 'I would that friends and enemies should see and know that the word of Attila, be it for good, or be it for evil, is never broken; and that any one who finds a promise of the king unfulfilled, should boldly say, Attila is dead.'

Thus speaking, he turned, and quitting the hall, issued out into the portico before the house of Bleda, over which the same calm moon was still shining; while round about, in awful silence, stood the dark circle of the Hunnish troops, waiting the conclusion of the fatal deeds enacting within that low and quiet-looking abode. Attila paused for a moment, and raised his hand to his eyes, as if the moonlight offended his sight. Then, striding forth into the open space, he turned and gazed for a few moments on the dwelling of Bleda. That contemplation was probably bitter, for as it ended, he exclaimed, 'Alas, my brother!' And that was the only regret to which, throughout his life, the lips of Attila gave voice.

There were old men who had known him as a boy, and who lived to see his death, but they declared that within that one night was comprised the whole that Attila had ever felt, either of indecision or regret.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE NEGRO.

THE wind blew keen over the plains through which the Danube wanders, ere, in approaching Orsova, it rushes between the giant mountains, through which it seems to have rent its onward course. Barbed with sleet, that cold wind dashed in the faces of the young Roman and his followers, as he led them onward towards the city of Margus, according to the directions which he had received from Attila by the way. He passed by Singidunum, and he rode through Tricornium. When last he had seen them, they were full of busy life, garrisoned with numerous troops, splendid with all the profuse luxury of old and corrupted civilisation. There was now a broken wall, a pile of ashes, solitude, silence, and the whispering grass—already, like the world's forgetfulness, grown up upon the grave of things once bright. From the gate of Singidunum started away a wolf, as the young Roman passed; but under the wall of Tricornium, a solitary hovel, raised from the massy ruins of a gate, and thatched with the branches of the leaves of trees, showed, that either accident, or old attachment, had brought back some human being to dwell in that place of desolation. Theodore approached, but he found it was no other than an old half-crazy woman, who, when she saw him, shrieked forth, 'The Huns! the Huns!' and fled, stumbling and tottering, amidst the piles of ruins.

What a strange contrast was it, when, the next day, he approached the gates of Margus! Gradually the desolation ceased; the country resumed its appearance of fertility: cultivated fields and rich gardens appeared; the villa, the palace, and the church crowned the summits of the gentle hills; and everything betokened uninterrupted peace, and a place of splendour, luxury, and repose. As he entered the gates were seen the Roman soldiers, fully armed and equipped; but his Hunnish garb, and the barbarian features of those who accompanied him, seemed rather passports to secure his entrance, than impediments in his way. No opposition was offered, and the soldiers gazed upon him with a smile.

In the market-place, which was crowded with people, as gay, as lively, as splendid as any city of the empire could display, a number of Huns were loitering about amongst the

rest; and a Greek flower-girl, mistaking him for one of the barbarians, ran up, and while she fixed a garland of myrtle, mingled with some of the latest flowers of autumn, to his saddle-bow, addressed him in a few broken mis-pronounced sentences in the Hunnish dialect, desiring him to buy her flowers with some of the spoils of the enemy he had slain in battle.

Theodore could have wept; but he answered the girl in Greek, telling her to place her wreaths on the tombs of those who had died in defence of their country; and he was riding on, when suddenly his eye was caught by a train crossing the market-place, and his ear almost deafened by the acclamations of the people. While slaves and attendants, in extraordinary numbers, both followed and succeeded, in the midst of the group which attracted so much attention, was seen a chariot of ivory and gold, drawn by four white horses; and in it sat, bowing his head to the people, and scattering benedictions as he passed with his hands extended wide in graceful dignity, Eugenius, Bishop of Margus.

Loud and repeated were the vivats of the multitude; and Theodore heard nothing on every side but warm and joyful praises of his kinsman. 'Our good bishop,' cried one.—'Bless him for ever,' exclaimed another.—'He alone saved us in peace and prosperity, when all was death and desolation round,' said a third.—'Ay,' rejoined his neighbour, 'and Theodosius himself, who would have given him up to death, is now thankful enough to him for having saved the town of Margus.'—'And well he may be,' said a fifth, who overheard what was proceeding; 'well he may be thankful to him, for saving the finest, if not the largest, city of his empire.'—'I have heard,' said another, 'that Theodosius has vowed to put him to death, but that he is forced to dissemble for fear of Attila.'—'He had better dissemble,' answered one of those who had spoken before; 'put to death! we would sooner give ourselves altogether up to the Huns.'—'The Huns are very good people,' continued another, seeing Theodore and his followers endeavouring to make their way past them. 'I love the Huns; they are honest, and keep their word, and are only terrible to their enemies.'

Theodore could not but smile, although his heart was full of bitterness; but he thought, at the same time, 'If all these people judge thus of the bishop's conduct, how many arguments may he not find in his own bosom to justify the acts he has committed.'

Thus thinking, he pushed on his horse, and made his way through the crowd towards the dwelling of the bishop, whither the chariot of the prelate seemed to have proceeded before him; for a crowd of men and boys, who had accompanied it with loud acclamations, were now gathered together round the gates, the janitor of which had much ado to keep them from pushing their way into the building. Theodore demanded to see his uncle, and told his name, on which he and all his followers were instantly admitted.

He found the bishop seated near the centre of the hall, with a crowd of attendants near him, while before him stood several Huns in their barbarian garb, one of whom had his hand upon a chain, which was attached to the neck and hands of the miserable, deformed, and mutilated negro, Zercon. He was nearly stripped of his fantastic clothing, and with bare feet, bloody with long journeying, he stood with a haggard but a tearless eye, venting, even at that hour of misery, one of those wild jests which had procured him favour with his former lord.

'Faith, sir,' he said, speaking apparently to the bishop, 'you had better order me death, if you intend to punish me properly; I have tried all other punishments but that, and therefore you have no choice left; as for the horrid prison that you talk of, I once inhabited for fifty years a prison more horrible than any you can devise.'

'For fifty years!' exclaimed the bishop, 'for fifty years! Say, where was that?'

'Here!' said the negro, striking his hand upon his breast: 'here! Match me that, if you can. Let the greatest tyrant that ever cumbered earth show me a prison that will equal this: and herein has dwelt, for fifty years, a being not less sensible of pain, not less alive to kindness, not less capable of gratitude than any; but more patient, more enduring, more courageous than you all. Here, in this loathsome and abhorred prison, has he dwelt, scorned, buffeted, contemned, accused, condemned, and punished without guilt, the sport of fools, and scape-goat of the bad. Everything has been tried upon me that human wickedness could frame, or man's endurance bear. Try death, at last! I cannot lose by the exchange.'

The eye of the bishop had remained fixed upon the deformed negro while he poured forth, in an eloquent tone, the words that we have repeated, and only wandered for a moment to the group of strangers who entered the atrium, observing nothing more than that they wore the common garb of the Huns. He was evidently moved by the man's speech, and was about to reply, when Theodore advanced, addressing him by his name. The bishop started up, and after gazing at him for a moment, folded him in his arms.

'Theodore!' he exclaimed, 'now can I welcome you indeed to Margus;—a Tadmor in the wilderness; a prosperous city in a land of desolation.—But how came you hither?'

'I will tell you shortly, sir,' replied Theodore; 'but, in the first place, let me ask you, why stands this poor man before you thus?'

'He was sent hither,' replied the bishop, 'by Attila, that great and mighty king, whose words are as true as his arm is powerful. He promised me, long ago, to protect and defend you; and this slave, it seems, betrayed your purposed journey into the mountains to the ear of Bleda, your enemy. Therefore is it that Attila sends him hither, to receive what punishment I will. I doom no man to death; but I was about to sentence him to solitude and chains, in the tower by the water side.'

'God has spared you a great crime,' replied Theodore. 'This man betrayed me not. Far from it. He aided to save my life, when, ere another evening sun had set, my fate would have been sealed. Twice has he contributed to deliver me from danger. Oh! set him free, my uncle. Take off that chain! it is not fitting for him. His mind is noble and generous, though his body is as thou seest. But what have we to do with that? God, wise and mysterious, has made him as he is; let us not trample on God's handiwork.'

The negro sprang forward, dragging his chain after him; and casting himself at the feet of the young Roman, he dewed his hand with tears. 'It is not,' he cried, 'it is not that you come to save me, but it is that you speak as if I were your fellow-man.'

'Far be it from me, my son,' said the bishop, 'to treat any one possessed of our common nature otherwise than as a Christian should do. We are all worms in the eyes of God, the greatest, the proudest, the most beautiful, as well as the lowly, and the distorted. Take the chain from him, and let him go free. Now, tell me truly, man, I adjure thee by whatever thou holdest sacred, tell me, was it thou who bore to Bleda the tidings of this youth's journey, and if so——'

'There is no if!' interrupted the negro, with solemn vehemence: 'I opened not my lips. Was I not the first to warn him, that Bleda hated him? Did I not convey to the ears of Attila himself timely notice of his brother's purpose, when Bleda whetted the sword against him between Viminacium and Cuppæ! Did I not hear Bleda vow, that till age palsied his arm, or death closed his eyes, he would pursue that youth with vengeance, and seek the destruction of that bold Arab, who dared to struggle with and overthrow him? Did I know all this, and do all this, and yet betray to the tiger thirsting for blood the track of the deer that he sought to overtake? Did I know all this, and do all this, and yet tell to Bleda that he, who had shown me pity and sympathy, came as it were to offer his throat to the knife within eight hours of that fierce man's dwelling-place? Oh no! I opened not my lips. There were whole tribes of Bleda's people round, when the boy Ernac told me that the Roman was about to depart from the land. They bore the tidings to the king; and he gained from Ellac, the eldest son, the course of his whole journey, and the number of people whom they supposed would follow him. The number proved ten times more than they expected, and Bleda had too few with him to attack them all. He took vengeance on the Arab, however; and the Roman youth, after Bleda's departure, fell into a trap baited with his freedman's blood. I betrayed him not, but I aided to save him, and he knows it.'

'I do,' answered Theodore: 'had it not been for thee, and for one whom I will not name, I had ended my life long ere now. But say, how am I to return to the dwelling of Attila, when the tribes of Bleda lie across my way?'

'Did not those who told thee to come hither tell thee more?' demanded the negro.

'They told me nothing,' answered Theodore, 'but that it was the will of Attila I should pass by Margus as I returned. Of Bleda they said nothing.'

'Bleda, oh Roman,' replied the negro, 'the powerful, the revengeful, the unforgiving, is like a dry stramonium bush in the desert, whose bitterness is parched up and gone, whose very thorns are withered and powerless. His name, his mighty name, is like the whisper of the wind among the rocks, speaking of tempests that we feel no more, of blasts from which we are sheltered!—Bleda is dead, oh, Roman; his arm is in the dust.'

'Dead!' said Theodore, a presentiment of the dark truth coming over him, even before it was spoken; 'dead! How did he die?'

'Those who told thee to come hither,' said the negro, 'were right to tell thee no more. Over the name of Bleda, and over his fate, there hangs a cloud: the Huns speak of it not, and are wisely silent; but of this I am sure, that there are not twenty men throughout all the land who do not feel that they are more at ease since there has been one great and unquiet spirit less in the world.'

'But his children!' exclaimed Theodore, now fully convinced by the dark hints of the negro, that the death of Bleda had been of an unusual and a bloody kind. 'His family? his children? what has become of them?'

'They are safe,' replied the negro, 'they are safe and well; and one fair maiden, good, and gentle, and kindly as thou art, would fain have saved even me, lowly as I am, from a fate that she knew I deserved not. But her intercession was of no avail; and to say the truth, for I am well nigh wearied out with

this sad life, I grieved more that she should plead in vain than that I should be the object for which she vainly pleaded.'

'My nephew shall try to make life more supportable to thee,' replied the bishop. 'Thou shalt go back with him, and he shall clear thee before the king. For well thou knowest, that when Attila has resolved the destruction of any one, no land can prove a shelter, no distance a barrier, no time an impediment, till he be avenged or appeased.'

'I know it well,' replied the negro; 'and I know also, and willingly will say it, that fierce and stern as that great king is sometimes called, no one is more easily appeased for personal offences, no one more attentive to justice where truth can be made plain. Even with his brother Bleda did he not forbear to the very last, though he well knew that his designs were pointed against Attila, not against the son of Paulinus.'

'How so?' demanded the bishop: 'thy words are dark, my brother; I know not and cannot even divine the cause of Bleda's hatred to my nephew. He injured him not.'

'I could make my dark words clear,' answered the negro in Greek. 'But I love not to talk of things that do not concern me, when there are many ears around.'

The bishop paused for a moment, and giving the attendants of Theodore and the Huns who had brought the negro thither into the hands of one of his own officers, he bade him entertain them well, and return to conduct the unhappy Zercon thence in a few minutes. The attendants of the bishop easily divined his wishes, and the hall being instantly cleared, the negro was left alone with Eugenius and Theodore.

'Now,' said the bishop, 'now explain this mystery, why a man in command of reason should hate and seek the death of another who had never injured or offended him, and that, too, at first sight.'

'Speak, Zercon,' added Theodore, 'and let us know the whole, for I have heard from Arderic and others a part of the story, yet much remains unexplained. Was it not some prophecy that——'

'Listen, and you shall hear,' said Zercon. 'When Attila first heard that this noble bishop had carried off some treasures——'

'I carried off no treasures!' exclaimed the prelate, 'and so I proved unto the king.'

'But he heard that you had,' answered the negro, 'and that cause—with many another offence committed by the Romans, together with some idle time on his part, and no other object of conquest before his eyes—made him resolve to pour the tide of war upon the eastern empire. When Attila then first determined upon war, he gathered his myriads together on the first plain beyond the mountains; and while messengers came to and fro, in order to avert hostilities which were already resolved, the king went up to the mountains to ask a holy man, who dwells there, the issue of his enterprise. So has he done in all the wars of the last five years, and the words of the hermit have ever proved true; for he promised Attila victory, and to those who know him it need not be a prophet to foresee that. Now, also, he assured him of success, but upon one condition. He told him that if he would ride down towards the Danube with but few followers, he would meet a Roman on the Hunnish bank of the river, whom he should spare, and protect, and love. If wrong befell that Roman, or any of his family, the old man told him, either from the hand of Attila himself, or any of his people, and if, for seven years, he, Attila, did not secure and protect him against all his enemies, not only his course of victory would cease, but death itself would cut him off in his return to his own hearth. "His fate," said the hermit to the king, when he told this tale, "his fate is bound up with yours! See that no evil happen to him, for worse will instantly fall upon yourself. You shall do him no wrong—you shall show him all favour. Go now and seek him!" Such were the old man's words.'

The Bishop of Margus smiled, as the negro proceeded, but Zercon went on with his tale: 'Attila rode on from that spot; but ere he had reached the banks of the great river he was met by some people posting inland to say, that a Roman had ventured across the stream but slenderly attended, notwithstanding the daily feuds that already gave notice of the coming war, and to ask what they should do with him. At those tidings, Attila and Bleda both saw the first part of the old man's prophecy fulfilled, and from that moment they doubted not one word of the rest. Attila went on without his brother, and found this youth.—Ye yourselves know all the rest.'

'Still we see not why Bleda should seek his life,' replied the bishop, 'unless, indeed, he sought to take his brother's also; and then he might have taken it at once.'

'He sought not to take his brother's life,' replied Zercon: 'he dared not, or he would; but be believed the prophecy, and thought that if this young Roman, on whom his brother's life and fortunes depended, were away, a hundred accidents in the course of war might lay the head of Attila in the dust. Ever through life did he covet whatever Attila possessed, and therefore was it that he sought at first to take a life on which that of his brother depended. Afterwards revenge was added to the same ambition; but his plans had gone still farther. His daring had in-

creased with impunity; and day by day he was nerving his heart to contend with Attila himself, vainly hoping that many of the great king's chiefs—perhaps even some of the monarch's children—would join him. But his life and his plots ended together.'

'Wert thou with Bleda?' demanded Theodore, to whose ear the prophecy of the old man, and its partial accomplishment, appeared strange and interesting: 'wert thou with Bleda and Attila when the hermit told him to go down to meet me?'

'I was!' replied Zercon, showing his white teeth with a wild laugh—'I was! Attila, when he set out, chose Arderic and Onegisus to go with him; and Bleda asked the king of the Gepidæ whom he had better choose, for they made a solemn ceremony of it. Arderic, who believes in no such things, replied, "Why, take your black jester!' and whether Bleda thought that too a prophecy, or not, I cannot tell, but certainly he took me, and I stood in the mouth of the cave while they conversed within.'

He was interrupted by a woman entering to draw water from the tank, in the midst of the hall; and ere she was gone, the bishop's officer returned to conduct Zercon from his presence.

'Use him well,' said the bishop, 'and kindly. Put him among the most favoured slaves; give him water to wash his feet, and food and wine. Nor must any one make a jest of him. It is forbidden in my dwelling to mock any of God's works.'

The slave and the negro retired, and Theodore was left alone with his uncle, round whose lip a somewhat doubtful smile had hung, during the whole of Zercon's account of that prediction which had obtained for his nephew security in some respects, and brought him into danger in others.

'The words of the good hermit, I rather think,' he said, as soon as the negro departed, 'have led even the mighty and clear-sighted Attila into error.'

'Indeed!' exclaimed Theodore, in some surprise; 'then you do not credit his pretensions to be a prophet?'

'He is better than a prophet, my son, he is a wise man,' replied the somewhat worldly prelate; but instantly seeing, by the mounting colour in his nephew's cheek, that his profane words had shocked the sensitive mind of youth, he added, 'Far be it from me to say that the gift of prophecy is not excellent; but it is better to be a good man, and wise unto God, than to be a prophet, and offend. This hermit is a man of all great qualities and Christian virtues; austere unto himself, charitable towards others; holy in life, spending his years in meditation and constant prayer! There is much reason to believe that to such a one the gift of prophecy might be extended. So much did I think of his wisdom, and so far did I trust in his advice being holy and good, that, ere the Huns poured down upon the Roman empire, I sent messengers to ask his counsel as to mine own conduct in such a moment of trial. He loves me well; and for many years I have profited by his wisdom and experience, till I am what I am. To show him and all men that personal fear was unknown to the bosom of Eugenius, I told him that on a certain day I would cross the Danube myself and advance towards the mountains, if he would come down to meet me; and I doubt not that his prophecy referred to me and not to thee. Attila came down sooner than was expected, and encountered thee on the way: thy sudden coming delayed me for a day; and ere I crossed the river, the myriads of the Huns were pouring down from the mountains. I obtained a promise of security, however, from Attila himself; saw him, found him mild to treat with, and easily appeased. The wiles of the Byzantine court he abhorred; but I told him truth. I offered to show him mine own treasury and the treasury of the city, and that we should purge ourselves, by the most solemn oath, of all share in taking that treasure, which his people declared they had lost; but at the same time I proposed to repay it with fourfold its value as amends. He received the proposal well; swore to me solemnly that he would protect thee and Flavia, and all her household; and, upon some other conditions which he made, he promised to give the citizens of Margus peace. Thou seest how he has fulfilled his word.'

'I see it, indeed, my uncle,' answered Theodore; 'I see that Margus, like an oasis in the Libyan sands, is fresh, and bright, and luxuriant, in the midst of ruin and desolation. But, alas! alas! would it have been so, if Margus had not opened her gates to the invader? if the first city of the Roman empire had made a stand against the barbarians as they poured upon the frontier?'

'The only difference would have been,' replied the bishop, his brow growing dark, 'that Margus would now have been in the same situation as the rest. What troops had we to resist? What means of defence had Theodosius given us? None! He thought but to appease the evil spirit of the war by drawing a line in my blood between himself and the wrath of Attila; and he took no measure to defend his territories, made no effort to protect his people. How did Viminacium stand, which had ten centuries within its walls? how did Tricornium resist? how Singidunum, how Naissus, Sardica, Ratiaria, and all the cities of the Illyrian border? Singidunum resisted for a day; Viminacium

saw the Hunnish myriads with the dawning light, and was a heap of ashes ere nightfall. So was it with all the rest!—Theodore, I am satisfied. In the midst of the desolation of the land, where many hundreds of thousands have fallen, where every trace of cultivation, and of sweet domestic peace, has been swept away, I have saved a Christian people in peace and prosperity, without one drop of blood shed, either of our own or others.'

Theodore thought that this was one of those few accidental cases where good had sprung from evil; but his heart, as a Roman and a man, told him that his uncle's reasoning was false. He replied not, however, and the prelate went on. 'I have done all this, Theodore, and I am satisfied. Is it not enough for the shepherd to save his sheep from the wolf, though the monster be obliged to seek his prey in some other flock? Would it not be enough for me to have delivered from peril and death those whom God has given to me, without any consideration of others? But when I know, and did know, that nothing I could have done would have saved myself or benefited them who have since fallen, ought I not to be satisfied? Whenever in my own heart a weak doubt arises, one shout of the glad multitude, who owe their lives to me, is sufficient to put all at peace within my breast. Yes, I can look back to every circumstance, and say, This have I done, and I am satisfied! But I have done more, oh Theodore!' he added, his mind seeming suddenly to turn into another path, and a different expression coming over his countenance—'I have done more! The weak, pale, cowardly Theodosius, who, trembling on his throne, would have spilt my blood, out of the true tyrant's vice of terror—the heretical wretch, led by the subtle Eutyches to persecute all those who hold the pure and orthodox faith—dare no longer wag a finger at Eugenius, or talk of punishing the citizens of Margus for submitting to an enemy they could not resist, and from whom he refused to defend them. He dare not dream of striking a hair from the head of one of the citizens of Margus! Nor, since Attila is thy protector, would he dare to lay hands upon thee, even if thou wert to cross the courts of his palace to-morrow.—No, not for his very throne!'

Theodore was unconvinced; but he refrained from reply, and turned the conversation to another part of the same subject, by relating to the bishop the kindly offers of protection which Flavia had received from Valentinian.

'He has kept his word,' replied the bishop, 'for such was the tenor of a promise that he made to me. Think not that I went rashly and hastily into even that act, which I knew would save Margus. To Theodosius I had applied for aid in vain, and I then applied to Valentinian. He could not aid me, but he justified my conduct, and promised me personal protection in case of need. I sent him messengers, when all was secure, and he engaged to give both to Flavia and yourself justice, protection, and support, in the empire of the West.'

Theodore felt that his uncle was kind, far more kind than he could have expected or hoped; he felt, too, that his mind was powerful, and his heart not without high and noble feelings; but, alas! the threads of cunning selfishness ran hither and thither through the whole, and, like the veins of some inferior substance in a precious stone, rendered nearly valueless the better part. Theodore felt that he could love Eugenius; but he would not have been Eugenius for the world.

Thus passed the day; but the next morning, as Theodore sat at meat with his uncle, it was announced that Edicon, one of the favourite officers of Attila, together with Maximin, ambassador from Theodosius, approached the city of Margus in their way, from Constantinople to the country of the Huns; and when Theodore beheld the reverence and respect which the ambassador himself, and those who accompanied him, evinced towards the prelate who had first received the barbarians into the empire, he could not help feeling how brilliant a thing in the eyes of man is successful evil. During a whole day the ambassador and his train sought repose in Margus—and Theodore determined to accompany him on his onward journey. His uncle forced upon him a casket of gold, ere he departed, conquering his aversion to receive it by declaring that it was a debt he had owed Paulinus; and Theodore, feeling that it might be needful, made no farther resistance.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THE WIDOW'S DWELLING.

NEAR a bend of the Tibiscus, on a meadow that might have refreshed the weary eye in summer by its beautiful verdure, the Romans pitched their tents at the close of their first day's journey in the land of the Huns. The night was dark and gloomy; no golden sunset had cheered the world on the departure of the light; and covering all the heavens, in long wavy lines from the horizon to the zenith, stretched out a canopy of heavy clouds, like waves of molten lead rolled over the sky. Maximin, struck and pleased with Theodore, had invited him to his tent; and there, by skilful and kindly inquiries, he won from the son of Paulinus a sketch of all the events which had affected him personally since the death of his father. There was much that Theodore omitted, because he trifled not with

the confidence of others ; but Maximin learned enough to show him that the youth was held by Attila in a state of honourable, but unwilling captivity ; and he resolved to use his best efforts to redeem him from such a situation.

While they thus conversed by the dull lamplight, the pattering of some heavy drops of rain was heard upon the tent, and, mingled with the rushing murmur of the Tibiscus, came the low sobbing of the rising wind. Their conversation, however, was too interesting to allow them to give much attention to the storm without ; for, besides the feelings of sympathy which Theodore had excited in the bosom of the noble Maximin, he had much information to communicate concerning the manners and habits of the Huns, and the character of Attila himself ; all which the ambassador knew might prove most valuable to him at an after period.

The rain increased whilst they talked ; the river roared and raged ; the wind rose into fierce gusts, and the poles of the tent were seen to quiver under the violent blasts, while the trickling drops began to welter through the tent, and threatened to extinguish the light. At length, after a long moaning sound, a fiercer gust than all the rest swept the sky ; the tent-poles shook, bent, gave way, tearing up the earth into which they were driven ; the cords and pegs, which stretched out the covering, were brokened or loosened in a moment, and the tent, with all that it contained, was dashed with fury to the ground.

As soon as Maximin and Theodore could disentangle themselves from the fallen mass, they found that the whole of their little encampment had shared the same fate. All was confusion and disarray. Every light had been extinguished : the torches, drenched with the fallen deluge, could not be lighted. The night was as black as the jaws of Acheron ; and all that could be distinguished was a glistening line of water, every moment approaching nearer, as the Tibiscus, filled by a thousand mountain torrents, began to overflow the meadow in which the Roman tents had been pitched.

While engaged in removing, with difficulty and haste, the horses and baggage to a more elevated situation, a number of lights were seen coming over the nearest hill ; and in a few moments forty or fifty Huns, bearing torches of resinous pine, which neither the rain extinguished, nor the wind blew out, came down to render assistance to the party of whose encampment in the neighbourhood they had heard before the storm. While some remained to aid in saving the baggage from the encroaching Tibiscus, others led Maximin, Theodore, and their companions, towards the village, which they said was not far off ; and as they went, Theodore saw several of the new-comers sporting, as an old acquaintance, with the negro Zercon, who had returned with him.

Calling the unhappy jester to him, Theodore asked who were to be their entertainers ; and a feeling of pain, as well as interest, passed through his bosom, when he heard that their steps were bent towards the dwelling of Bleda's widow.

'I knew not that the village was so near the river,' said Theodore, 'and yet I know the country well.'

'She dwells not where she did dwell,' replied Zercon. 'When gall is mingled with hydromel, we abhor the sweet drink that we used to love, and its very sweetness makes the bitter more nauseous. Scenes that we have loved, when associated with painful memories, like honey mixed with gall, are more repugnant to us from the remains of sweetness. She has never dwelt where she did dwell since her husband's death. It was in visiting that spot, after having been hidden for many weeks, that I was found by the soldiers of Attila, and driven on foot to Margus.'

Theodore made no reply, but walked on thoughtfully, by the side of Maximin. In a few minutes they saw before them the village towards which their steps were bent, and the porch of the widow's dwelling, from the windows of which streamed forth many a light to guide them on the way ; and gladly the Romans approached the hospitable walls which promised them shelter from the inclemency of the weather.

As they entered the wooden portico, the widow of Bleda, and a number of other women, came forth to meet them, but Neva was not amongst the rest. With a calm but somewhat sad demeanour the widow welcomed Maximin and his companion Priscus, and Edicon, who followed next. But when her eyes fell upon Theodore, she paused for a moment, and gazed on him with a dark and melancholy look. At length the tears burst forth in large drops from her eyes ; and, casting her arms round the young Roman, whom in his illness she attended as her own child, she exclaimed, 'It was not your fault, my son ! it was not your fault ! Be you welcome also !'

The table was already spread for a banquet in the great hall. Three blazing fires of odorous pine were lighted to dry the garments of the guests, and everything bespoke rapid preparations made to exercise the kindest rites of hospitality. No sooner were their vestments dry than large portions of venison, and various kinds of game from the neighbouring woods, were set before them ; and while the widow stood by, to see that nothing was wanting to their comfort, a fair train of girls, followed by

several slaves, came in to hand the cups of rich and excellent wine, which flowed abundantly around. At their head appeared Neva, the daughter of the house. She was clad in deep grey cloth, with broad furs of sable bordering her robe. Her arms, up to the shoulders, were bare, and the snowy whiteness of her skin, beside those dark furs, looked like Indian ivory contrasted with ebony.

Theodore saw her enter with feelings of deep agitation, for he feared lest she should be pained and grieved by the sight of him for whom she had done and suffered so much. It would appear, however, that some one had prepared her for his presence, for she looked not upon him when first she entered, but went round with the rest, and only raised her eyes once to his countenance ere she approached him in turn. That one glance showed Theodore that she recognised him, but was nevertheless quite calm; and when she approached him, and took a cup of wine from one of the attendants to give it to him, she stood by his side, and, looking in his face with a melancholy smile, she said aloud, 'How art thou, my brother? Art thou well after thy long journey; And hast thou seen the friends thou lovest? and are they happy?'

Theodore could have wept; there was something so sad, and yet so resigned under her grief, in the tone of that fair young creature, who, if ever sorrow spared a human breast, should surely have been sheltered from the arrows of adversity. He strove against his feelings, however, and replied calmly, thanking her for all her kindness and all her generosity. Maximin gazed with some surprise to see the tender interest which the family of the dead king seemed to take in his countryman, but he made no remark aloud; and retiring soon from the banquet, the whole party of journeyers sought repose.

Weariness made most of them sleep long; but Theodore was awake and up by the dawning day. Sleep would not visit him in that dwelling; and with the first grey light of the morning he left the chamber which had been assigned him. He found Zercon, the jester, stretched, sleeping, on a skin at his door; and the moment the passing of the young Roman woke him, he started up, and ran away through some of the passages of the house. Theodore went on into the porch and gazed out, and in a moment after Neva was by his side.

'I bade poor Zercon watch for you, Theodore,' she said, 'because I wished to ask you, ere you went, to wander for an hour once more with Neva in the morning woods. Will you not, my brother? I have many a question to ask you, and I cannot ask them here, where everybody may hear them, or interrupt them. Will you not come, my brother?'

'Willingly, sweet Neva,' replied Theodore, still holding the hand she had given him in his. 'Let us go.' And they wandered forth together along a path which, winding in amongst the trees, turned at each step of the hill, showing the woody world below under some new aspect every moment. The wind had cleared the sky, and the day was fine; but Neva seemed more sad than on the night before. She said but little for some way as they wandered on, but asked him questions about his journey, in a wild, rambling way. At length, however, with a forced smile, but a trembling tone, she said, 'And of course you saw your promised bride?'

'I did,' said Theodore, 'and I told her that I twice owed my life to you, in sickness and in danger.'

Neva, however, seemed to take but little notice of his reply. Continuing, apparently, in the same train of thought in which she had begun, 'And did you think her very beautiful?' she said—'as beautiful as ever?'

'More so,' answered Theodore, 'far more so.'

Neva smiled. 'May you be happy!' she said; 'may you be happy! Doubtless the time since I saw you last has been a happy time to you and her, but it has been a terrible time to me and mine. You know that they came and slew my father, even on his couch of rest?' and she fixed her full bright eyes upon him with a look of painful earnestness.

Theodore saw that she waited his answer, and replied, 'I heard so, for the first time, three days ago, at Margus.'

'Did you not know it before?' she cried eagerly. 'Did no one tell it you? Did you not know that it would be so?'

'Never!' answered Theodore. 'How could I guess that so fearful, so terrible a deed was so near its accomplishment?'

'Thank God for that!' she cried; 'thank God for that! That is peace and balm indeed. But let us sit down here,' she added, pausing at a rocky bank where a break in the woods showed the country stretched beneath their feet, and the Tibiscus wandering in the distance—'let us sit down here, and talk over it all. Oh, Theodore! my heart has been sad since I saw you. They came and slew my father in the night, and I knelt at the feet of his terrible brother and begged for his life in vain; and afterwards they said that it was for what he had done against you that he was slain. I feared and fancied that you had stirred up Attila against him, and I remembered that I had set you free, and that I—I might thus have had a share in my father's death.'

She paused for a moment, terribly agitated; but ere Theodore could find words to comfort her, she went on rapidly: 'But think not,' she said, 'think not, for one moment, that,

even had it been so, I would have wished what I had done undone. I saved the innocent from the cruel death they meditated against him. I saved the good and the innocent, and I had nought to do with the rest. Yet, it was terrible, Theodore—oh, how terrible!—to think that I had aided to spill my father's blood, by saving him that I love;' and, leaning her head upon his shoulder, she wept long and bitterly.

'Weep not, Neva!' said Theodore, 'weep not, my sister! You did but what was generous and noble, and that deed had no share in your father's death. All my own followers, but one or two, had escaped when I was taken, and they, not I, bore to the ears of the king the tidings of what had happened. I did nothing to provoke him against thy father; but had I been slain, the wrath of Attila would have been still greater. Weep not, dear Neva!' he continued, as her tears, having once more burst forth, flowed on apace; 'weep not!' And, holding her in his arms, he called up every argument to console her. He held her in his arms: he used many a tender and endearing epithet: he even pressed his lips upon her cheek; and yet no feeling but one, pure, noble, and generous, was in his heart at that moment. There was a being that loved him with the most devoted affection which the human heart can feel, clinging to him in her deep distress, weeping on his bosom, pouring out her griefs and apprehensions to his ear; and though he could not return her love as love, yet his heart told him that he would be ungrateful if he felt towards her otherwise than as a brother. The kiss that he pressed upon her cheek was not cold, because it was kindly; and the arms which encircled her held her tenderly because gratefully: but it was with the embrace of fraternal protection. Shame upon those who cannot comprehend such feelings! That kiss and that embrace seemed but to say, 'Neva, you have lost your father, but you have yet one in the world, who, if he cannot, if he ought not, to feel for you as you feel for him, will protect, will console, will sympathise with you—nay, will love you dearly, tenderly, though with but a brother's love.'

Neva felt that it was so. She would have started from his arms with fear, had there been aught of passion in their touch; she would have fled from him for ever, had there been aught of fire on his lips: but it was all kindly tenderness, and she laid her head upon his shoulder to weep as she would have done upon a brother's.

After a while her tears ceased, and she looked up. 'You have taken the thorn from my heart, Theodore,' she said; 'I shall now sleep at nights. My fancy had conjured up many strange things; for though I knew you to be kind and generous, yet I knew you had been greatly wronged, and that the poor Arab, who had watched you with me through a long, sad sickness, had been slain by my father's commands; and I thought that, in your anger, you might have gone back to Attila and demanded blood for blood. Then I, by saving you, might have slain my own father; and I was afraid to ask my own heart if I would not have done so, even if I had known how it was all to end. But you give me peace, by telling me that the end would have been the same, even had you been slain.'

'The end might have been worse, my sister,' replied Theodore, 'for Attila's wrath might have known no bounds; and besides, his anger against your father was of no new date. I heard him warn him months before, that the cup of his indignation was full, and that another drop would make it run over. That drop was certainly the death of the poor Arab, Cremera, but of that Attila was aware ere I reached his dwelling after my escape, and the vengeance he took was all unasked by me.'

'Oh, thanks be to the gods!' replied Neva gladly, 'for I have felt as if a rock had fallen upon my heart and crushed it, ever since that thought crossed my mind. But now, Theodore, now I am happy.'

'And happy, entirely happy, should I too be, dear Neva,' replied Theodore, 'if I could find any way of showing to you my deep gratitude and regard. Oh, Neva, that I could be a brother to you, and protect you against danger and sorrow, and wipe every tear away from your eyes!'

'And so you shall,' she answered, with a smile which had still its share of sadness; though as soon as the bitterness of her tears was over, she had withdrawn herself gently from the young Roman's arms and now sat apart. 'And so you shall. You shall wed your fair bride, and I will come and dwell near you, and see your happiness, and find pleasure in it too, Theodore, and never be envious: and you will be kind to me; and she will, too, I am sure, for your sake; all the time, too, that you dwell amongst the Huns, I will watch for moments to help and befriend you, so that I shall have a right to share in your regard, and in hers too; and then, perhaps, the end of our days may glide by in peace. Oh, how gladly will I devote a whole life to guard and care for you! Remember, too, your promise! Send to Neva when you need aid or counsel. Aid, strong and powerful, she can procure you even yet; counsel, if she cannot give it wisely, she can obtain from those who can. And now let us return, my brother. You will be glad to know that you have made poor Neva as happy as it is possible for her to be.'

Thus saying, and with one of those blander and more beaming smiles which Theodore had often seen upon her face, ere yet a grief had shaded it, she turned and led the way down the hill. The world were now all abroad ; but she took her way on through the midst by the young Roman's side, seemingly careless of all attempt to conceal an attachment for which she felt no shame.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### THE FEAST OF ATTILA.

SPLENDOUR and feasting reigned in the halls of Attila. Round the immense hall of his cottage palace were spread tables on every side ; and the wooden walls, quaintly carved and ornamented, were further decorated for the festal day, by large green bows torn from the fir, the laurel, and the ilex. These, gathered together in a knot, with cords of woven rushes, were fixed against the pannels as high up as the arm of a man could reach ; and, bending over like a plume of flowers, each nodded above some trophy of barbarian arms, the shield, the bow, the spear, the corselet, which, tastefully grouped together, hung, not without poetic meaning, in the midst of the evergreens. Above all, waved a thousand banners, and between the trophies enormous torches shed a light redder than that of day, but scarcely less bright than noon.

Below, six long tables were covered with an immense mass of gold and silver. Cups, vases, beakers, of every form and shape, glittered on those boards ; while round about, seated at easy distances, appeared all those bold and ruthless chiefs, who, under the command of a greater mind, led on the myriads of Attila to battle. There might be seen every garb, from the furs of the extreme north to the silks and linen of the far east ; and there, upon the persons of those daring leaders, blazed gems and precious stones, of which the voluptuous monarchs of Persia and of India might have been envious. There, too, were all faces, forms, and complexions, from the small-eyed Tartar of remote Thibet to the fair-haired northman, and the blue-eyed Goth. There were the splendid features of the Georgian and Circassian hordes ; the beautiful Alani, who brought a race of loveliness from the side of the Caucasus and the shores of the Caspian, and the hard-featured Hun, or the frightful Ougour, glittering with jewels and precious stones, above the unwashed filth of his native barbarism.

All was splendour and pomp : cushions, of which luxurious Rome itself might have been proud, covered with crimson and lined with down, were spread over the seats, and supported the arms of the guests ; and the bright gleam of the torches was flashed back on every side from some precious, or some glittering, object.

In the middle of the side opposite to the windows was placed a small wooden table bearing a single dish, formed of oak, and a cup of wild bull's horn : a dagger, that served for a knife, lay beside the dish, and a drawn sword of enormous weight stretched across the table. That table, with a seat of plain unadorned white wood, was placed for the use of the lord of all those around ; and there he sat, the plain dark Hun, covered with no jewels, robed in no splendour, clad in the simple habit of the Scythian shepherds, but with more of the monarch in his looks than gems or diadems could have given, and with the consciousness of indisputable power sitting proud upon his towering brow. What were rubies or diadems to Attila? They were parcels of the dust on which he trod !

At the tables, on either hand, sat Arderic, King of the Gepidæ, Valamir, King of the Ostrogoths, Onegisus, Ellac, Edicon, Maximin, Priscus, Theodore ; and at tables farther off, were placed Constantius, the Latin secretary of Attila, and Vigilius, the interpreter of Maximin's embassy. Many another king, and many another chief, was there ; and nearly five hundred guests, almost all leaders of different nations, showed by their different features and their different garbs, the extent of Attila's dominion. In the same hall also were collected the ambassadors from several distant countries ; and there appeared humble envoys from Valentinian, Emperor of the West, as well as Maximin, whose coming from the Eastern Empire we have already noticed.

Viands in profusion were placed upon the table, and delicacies of every kind gratified the palate of the most luxurious ; rich wines, of many a varied sort, circled in abundance ; and barbaric music, wild, but not inharmonious, floated through the hall, mingling with, but not interrupting, the conversation of the guests. A multitude of slaves served the banquet with rapidity and care ; and no one had cause to say that, in the hospitality of Attila, he had been at all neglected.

At length, an elevated seat was placed in the midst of the hall ; and an old but venerable man, with long white hair and snowy beard, slowly ascended and took his place thereon, while an attendant handed him up a small rude harp. In a moment, all the Huns were silent, while, with careful hand and bent down ear, he put some of the strings of his instrument into better tune. The next moment, he looked up for a single instant, with the natural glance turned towards the sky which almost every one uses when seeking for elevated words and thoughts ; and then, running his hand over the strings, he

produced a wild and somewhat monotonous sound, to which he joined a rich, deep voice, a little touched, perhaps, but scarcely impaired by age. It was more a chant than a song; but every now and then the plain recitation ceased, and he burst forth into a strain of sweet, of solemn, or of majestic melody, as the subject of which he sung required.

The matter of his song was war and glorious deeds; and though the tale referred to former times and other countries, when Ruga first led the conquering Huns to triumph over all other nations of the earth, yet ever and anon, with dexterous skill, he alluded to some late exploit in which the warriors around him had had a share. The noble, reckless daring of Arderic, the keen sagacious wisdom of Valamir, were mentioned with loud applause; and many another had his share of fame; but still, when wonderful policy, or heroic courage, or warrior skill, required some more striking and extraordinary comparison, the deeds of Attila still rose to the poet's tongue, and a new inspiration seemed to seize him, when he borrowed his illustrations from the life of the mighty man before whom he sat.

While gazing upon him, as he struck the harp, with his white beard mingling with the strings, Theodore could have fancied that he beheld the great master of the epic, singing, amidst the isles of Greece, the marvellous deeds of her primeval warriors; and for the first time he could guess what had been the enthusiasm, what the inspiring interest, with which the voice of Homer had been heard, and which, graving each word deep on memory, had served to transmit the great first model of the poet's art to after ages from his own rude and early day.

Breathless silence hung listening to the song, except when, on some more powerful appeal to the passions of his hearers, a loud and approving shout of gratulation burst upon the poet's ear. Even the slaves paused in their office; and, when the song was over—after one moment during which not a voice was heard—some lip broke the charmed quiet with a word of applause, and one universal cry of admiration completed the triumph of the verse.

A slave filled hastily the wine-cup for Attila, and as the monarch rose from his seat gave another to the bard.

'Father of song,' said the king, 'I drink unto thee: may thy hand never lose its strength, nor thy voice its sweetness, nor the footstep of time wear the memory of mighty deeds from the tablet of thy brain!'

The cup was filled again, and to each of his most famous warriors, calling upon them by name, Attila drained the cup with some words of thanks and praise. To Maximin and Priscus, also he drank, and then with ready celerity the slaves cleared the dishes from the table, and another service as splendid as the first supplied its place.

At every course, Attila thus drank to his guests, and song and music went on, but not with the effect that they produced at first. The merriment grew higher and more loud; and Attila at length despatched a slave across the hall to bid Vigilius, the interpreter of the Eastern embassy, to advance and speak with him.

With a bending head and air of profound reverence, the cunning Byzantine approached the king. The monarch motioned him to come nearer, and then addressed him in a low tone, laying at the same time one finger of his sinewy hand upon the blade of the naked sword that lay beside him. What he said, no one heard; but the effect upon the countenance of Vigilius was strange and fearful. The rose at no time flourished very luxuriantly upon his cheek; but now that cheek turned pale as death. A green and ashy hue, something even beyond the tint of death itself, spread over all his face. His eyes opened wide, his jaw dropped, and both Maximin and Theodore, whose looks were fixed upon him, thought that he must have fallen to the ground. Attila, however, bowed his head, as a signal that the interpreter might retire; and then perceiving that he could scarcely walk, the king beckoned to an attendant, saying coldly, 'Lead him back to the table, or from the hall if he prefer it.'

But Vigilius returned to the table, and drank cup after cup of wine. Attila looked round to Arderic with a meaning glance, and then he bade one of the slaves send in the jesters. A moment after, two of those miserable beings entered the hall, and one of those scenes of rude and dissolute merriment ensued which makes the heart ache for human nature. Laughter rang from every part of the hall; but the face of Attila was unmoved even by a smile. He sat and heard with calm and thoughtful gravity; and though he looked round from time to time, and noticed with careful consideration his various guests, yet it is probable his mind was far away, occupied with more important interests.

At length, gliding in amongst the slaves, who, with their busy services, occupied the greater part of the space which the tables left unfilled in the centre of the hall, appeared the boy Ernac, and took his way towards the table at which his father sat. The first smile that crossed Attila's lip beamed on it as the boy appeared; and greeting him with many a fond caress, as he hung at his knee, he spoke with him for a few moments in a low tone, with an expression which showed how that stern heart was melted at the sight of tender youth. After a while, lifting his eyes, he

looked towards the part of the hall at which Theodore was seated, and at the same time spoke a few words to his son. The boy's eyes instantly followed those of his father; and bounding away as soon as they lighted upon Theodore, he was at the youth's side in a moment and greeting him, with eyes radiant from pleasure upturned towards his face, while his lips poured forth words of gratitude and gladness.

'I thought thou hadst gone away, and left us for ever,' he said, 'though my father said that thou wouldst return. Yet, I remember, when I lost a young wolf that I had tamed, they all told me it would return, but it never came again. It was too wise,' he added, laughing, but with a gleam of intelligent light beaming from his eyes. 'It was too wise, when it had got back to its woods and to its own way of life, to come back to captivity and strange customs.'

Arderic, who sat near, laughed at the boy's simile; and Theodore, smiling also, answered, 'And so I suppose, Ernac, because we Romans say the great founder of our city was nourished by a wolf, you thought I must needs follow the example of your wolf's whelp. But did it promise you it would return before it went?'

'No!' answered the boy, laughing; 'and you did promise my father to come back:—I know that is what you mean; and I did not intend to say that you were wrong to keep your word. If my wolf had returned, I should have loved it better, even though it made no promise, because that would have showed it loved me.'

'And do you love every one who loves you, Ernac?' demanded Theodore: 'if so, love me, for I love you.'

'And so I do, noble Theodore,' answered the boy: 'ungrateful should I be if I did not love you. I always love those who are brave and generous, and I shall ever love you, because you saved my life, and risked your own to save it. So I will try in return to love you better than myself, and I will ask my father to make you a king instead of me.'

'But would you not wish to be a king, Ernac?' demanded Arderic. 'Power is a great thing, boy! Power and command, to a brave and wise man, are not to be despised. Would you not wish to be a king?'

'Not I!' answered the boy: 'I will be a chief under my father or my brother, and lead men to battle; but I never saw that kings were happier than other men. I would rather have some one to tell me what to do, and to make sure that I did not do wrong, than have no one to guide me, and be obliged to blame myself every day. Even you, noble Arderic, you are a king, and yet you come to fight under my father's standard, and are willing to do what he commands.'

A slight flush came over Arderic's cheek; but he replied, without anger, 'True, Ernac; but we have not every day an Attila. The wisest, and the noblest, and the bravest, may be proud to obey him; but a weaker king might find a foe in Arderic where Attila finds a friend. With pleasure we obey those that we respect, but we spurn from us those that we despise.'

'That is what I mean,' said Ernac; 'I would sooner obey some one whom I could love and reverence than take all the trouble of making others respect and yield to me. No, I would rather not be a king; but I would fain see Theodore a king, and striking down enemies beneath his arm, as he struck down the wild urus.'

Both Arderic and Theodore smiled, perhaps to think how readily that unambitious spirit might learn in after years the lesson of aspiring; but if they thought so they were wrong: for such as it then showed itself, was the natural moderation of the young chief's spirit; and it never became contaminated, even in mingling in scenes of strife and contention, where every one strove for dominion except himself.

They looked up, however, at the same moment; and both remarked, as their glance accidentally wandered over the opposite table, that the eyes of Ellac, the eldest son of Attila, were fixed upon them and Ernac with a look of jealous malignity, as the boy stood by them and prattled of all his fancies.

Arderic turned to Theodore, saying, in a low tone, 'Were all as moderate as this fair boy, a bitter strife might be averted from the future.'

But as Theodore was about to answer, Maximin and the rest of the Romans rose to withdraw; and knowing to what a pitch of excess the revels of the Huns were often carried, the son of Paulinus followed his countrymen from the hall.

Late and long the intoxicating juice flowed in the banquet chamber of Attila; but early on the following morning Maximin was admitted to the presence of the king, and a long audience terminated as favourably as the Roman ambassador could wish. Even Vigilius seemed to forget the fear that some casual words of Attila had called forth: and at the end of a few days, the envoy and his train took their departure from the Hunnish village, bearing with them rich presents. Several Roman captives also had been liberated at their request; but, alas! though Maximin tried eagerly to persuade Attila to free Theodore from the promise he had made to remain amongst the Huns, the monarch was, on that point, inexorable.

Some months passed by in the sports and occupations of winter, and Theodore became

more and more accustomed to the manners of the barbarous nations amongst which he lived. The favour of Attila towards him was unbounded; and the commanding mind of that great conqueror was not without its effect upon the heart of Theodore. He became fond of the proximity and conversation of the Hunnish king, and felt a sort of strange and exciting pleasure in the vague sensation of awe with which Attila inspired all those who approached his presence. The monarch's kindness attached him, and his greater qualities gained the young Roman's reverence, even while the strange excess of his worse passions mingled a degree of regret in the sensations which he felt towards him.

At the same time, the favour in which Theodore stood with Attila, though it caused him some enemies, gained him many friends and courtiers; and, kind-hearted, liberal, bold, skilful, and active, possessing all those qualities, in short, which barbarous nations most admire, united to the graces and accomplishments of civilised life, Theodore won the love of many for his own sake; so that the halls of his dwelling were far more frequently filled with the noblest and greatest of Attila's chiefs, than those of Ellac, the monarch's eldest son.

At length, as spring began again to blossom over the earth, the interpreter, Vigilius, once more appeared at the court of Attila, accompanied by his son. But then came forth the secret of his former journey, and of the words that Attila had spoken. The base intriguer was instantly seized and brought before the king, on whose right hand stood Edicon as his accuser. Around were placed the chieftains of the Hunnish nation, and, in their presence, Edicon charged the interpreter, Vigilius, with having endeavoured to seduce him, during his embassy to the court of Constantinople, to take the life of Attila on his return. Seemingly yielding to the entreaties of Vigilius and Chrysapheus, he had feigned, he said, to enter into all their plans; but immediately on reaching his native land he had revealed the whole to Attila, who, with noble magnanimity, had suffered the suborner of his subjects to come and go unarmed under shelter of the character of Maximin the ambassador, who had been kept in ignorance of the base designs of those who sent him. But when, after having been warned that his treachery was discovered, the interpreter dared again to show his face in the country of the Huns, bearing bribes to the officers of the king, vengeance might well be demanded, and Attila determined that the accusation should be publicly made, and the crime fully punished.

Vigilius, of course, denied his crime; but when the very purse which contained the bribe he brought to Edicon was laid before him, and death—bitter death—was awarded by the assembled chieftains, both to himself and to the son, who was the companion of his journey and the sharer of his guilt, his courage failed; and, confessing his crime, but laying the burden thereof upon the eunuch Chrysapheus, he petitioned for life and pardon with all the eloquence of terror.

Attila gazed upon him as he would upon a writhing worm in his path; and scorning to tread on so pitiful a thing, he sent his ambassadors to demand of Theodosius the head of the chief instigator of the treason meditated against him. Theodosius bought the pardon of his minions with gold wrung from his people; and Attila continued to treat with the monarch of the eastern empire, while he prepared to turn his arms against the west.

These things, however, have been related on an eloquent, though not impartial, page; and to that I must refer those who would go deeper into the history of the time.—This is but a story of a narrower sphere.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### THE LETTERS.

He stood alone at the door of his dwelling, gazing forth upon the summer sflnset, as—reflected in rays of gold and rose colour from the summits of the mountains where the snow still lingered—it spread in floods of brightness over the western sky. During the day there had been in the royal village of the Huns a certain degree of silent activity, the coming and going of messengers here and there, the frequent gathering together in small groups, the examination of horses and arms, and the arrival of strangers from distant lands which betokened, in general, some approaching expedition. As Theodore stood and gazed out on the splendours of the dying day, he thought that ere now, on such an evening as that, he had drank draughts of deep enjoyment from that well of sweet sensations, unpolluted nature; but yet before the sun had risen again, the bright hopes to which that exciting draught gave rise had been trampled, like flowers before a war horse, beneath the feet of Fate. Perhaps it was that the indications of some near coming change, which he had witnessed during the day, had occasioned such feelings, and called up such memories; but as he stood and gazed, a slave, from the dwelling of Attila, approached with rapid steps, and put into his hand some small leaves of vellum, rolled carefully up, and tied with waxed threads.

'From the land of the Alani,' was all that the slave said, as he delivered them, and then departed without waiting for any questions. With a beating heart Theodore opened the

packet, and sitting down on a seat before his door, he read as long as the declining day would permit, and then entering his dwelling, concluded his task by the lamp.

THE LETTER.

'You have not come, oh Theodore! You have not written. And yet to come was impossible, neither could any messenger bear me a letter hither, for the snow has lain upon the mountains deeper and more terrible than ever I thought to behold. Why then should I think of things that were impossible for you to do? It was because I longed for that which was impossible; it was because love would not be persuaded of difficulties in the way of gratification.

'Oh! how weary have been the hours, how dull, how tedious, since you left us to return to your barbarian home! Each moment has seemed to linger on the way, longer and more tardily than the rest; and the wintry year, as it went along, seemed to creep with the laggard steps of age, slowly and more slowly, as every new hour was added to the burden that it bore. Neither have the objects around me been such as to give my mind any means of withdrawing itself from that on which it dwells. The white robe of winter has covered all; clouds have hung upon the sky, and obscured the sun; the forests have disappeared beneath mountains of snow; and the grand features of the Alps themselves, softened and rounded by the same monotonous covering, have lost those fine and striking forms which we looked upon and admired together, when you were here.

'During the summer, I found a thousand objects to take—no, not to take my thoughts from you, but by recalling sweet moments and beautiful scenes which we had enjoyed together, to create a bright illusion from my heart, and make me think the past not so irretrievable, the present less painful, the future more full of hopes. Then I could gaze over the lake, and mark the sinuosities of the shore, till I could have fancied myself at Salona, and mistaken that small water, with its tiny waves, for the grander and more splendid Adriatic. I could sit upon the little grassy promontory beneath the clump of pines, and think of the mound of cypresses by the banks of the Hyader; I could gaze upon the mountains, and remember blue hills that rose between us and Sirmium; and, with all, and each, and everything, one beloved idea would mingle like sunshine, giving light and beauty to the whole, one dear form would wander by my side through the world of imagination, rendering all harmonious by the music of his voice.

'During the summer, I could gaze upon the flowers, I could listen to the birds; I could taste the fresh breezy air of morning, and think of you. Nothing that was sweet to mine eye, nothing that was dear to my heart, nothing that was melodious to mine ear, could I see, or know, or hear, without remembering you. But since then, the whole has changed: ere you had been gone ten days, the snow came down, covering the whole country round, even to our very door. The flowers are gone; the air of summer breathes no more; the birds are mute; no objects that we have seen together strike mine eye; no sounds that we have loved to listen to salute mine ear; and yet, day and night I think of you; but not with bright hopes or roused up memories: rather with a sad and longing regret that you are not with me, to cheer the darkened prospect, and be the sunshine of my wintry life.

'Oh! if it be possible, come to us soon, my Theodore; come and soothe us by your presence, and direct us by your advice. There are rumours abroad amongst the nation with which we dwell, which add difficulty and uncertainty to the heaviness of exile, and the pain of being separated from you. They say that the king of this land has offended Attila, and that the implacable monarch threatens vengeance. All hear the tidings with fear and horror, for his wrath is as unsparing as the breath of the tempest, which with one blast overthrows the weak and the strong together. Messengers are now sent to propitiate him, and they bear this letter; but heaven knows, and heaven only, whether any excuse will be received, any atonement permitted.

'Come to us then, my Theodore, if you can; and if you cannot come, find means to write to us speedily; inform us what we are to expect; tell us what we ought to do, for terrible, indeed, would be our situation, in the midst of a strange land, and of a people who, though kind, are but the friends of yesterday, if war were to be added to all that is already painful in our situation.

'My mother says that you will warn us of any danger, and inform us what is the best course for us to pursue. She declares that she has the most perfect confidence in you, and that at the court of Attila you will soon learn, and be able to warn us of the result. But still I perceive that she is anxious; still I see that she sits alone, and thinks with care over the future; still I mark that she listens eagerly to every tale and rumour concerning the approaching events.

'Ammian is as thoughtless as ever, thinking justly and wisely when he does think, but seldom giving himself the trouble to reflect at all; and yet, Theodore, it is time that he should think, for every day the change that is working itself in his form strikes me more

and more; and though but a few months have passed since you saw him, I think you would say, could you behold him now, that he has made no small progress towards manhood. Nevertheless, his pleasures are still as wild, as roving, as uncertain as ever: he seems to find delight only in perils and dangers; in the rough exercise of the mountain chase, in springing from rock to rock, where even the mountain hunters tell him to beware, or in traversing the turbulent streams, bridged by the ice, when the footing is scarcely solid enough to bear him as he passes. Then, again, when he has roamed far and wide, for many a day, he seems wearied with one kind of sport, and sits down to weave wreaths of evergreen for Eudochia's hair, or to sing us the songs that he composes in his wanderings, to the tunes that he catches up from the pipes of the mountaineers, as they sit watching their flocks in some sunny spot upon the hill-side.

'Often, too, Theodore, when I see him and Eudochia sitting together with all that fond affection which they have shown towards each other from infancy, I think how strange, and yet how happy it would be, if the same feelings, which have sprung up in your heart and mine, from the same childish regard, should with them also arise to bind them for ever to each other. He loves her certainly even now, as much as he loves anything, and he has, too, the power of loving deeply, notwithstanding all his wildness.

'How he loved your father, Theodore! how deeply! how lastingly! Even now, seldom a day passes but he thinks or speaks of Paulinus; and making his javelin quiver in his hand, longs to plunge it in the breast of Chrysapheus.

'Such feelings are strange, and I know not whence they arise; yet, when I think of them, I feel as if I, too, could experience them with the same intensity. If I picture to myself any one injuring you, oh Theodore! I fancy that I, too, could hold the dagger or cast the spear. Think you not that we ought all to have been born in the old times of Rome, when men sacrificed everything for their country, and even women shared in the same patriotic devotion? Always, Theodore, when my mind rests upon you, I imagine you overthrowing tyrants, hurling down the Tarquin, driving Appius from his polluted seat, or leading armies for the defence of Rome; and I believe that I could have stood by your side, have shared your dangers, consoled your cares, enjoyed your triumphs, or died in your defence.

But whither am I wandering? Far from the present scene, and present dangers, into the wide land of imagination, to encounter the chimeras of my own brain. Dangers enough and perils now surround us without my dreaming of others; and your Ildica will show, beloved, that she can bear with firmness, if not act with energy, in difficulties, perhaps, as great as those which her fancy paints.

'I will not say, Come to us! my Theodore, for that may be impossible for you to do: I will not say, Write! for that may be equally so; but come if you can, write if you are able. Tell us how we ought to act, and we will do it. Show us if there be really the danger which rumour teaches us to apprehend, and say what you think the best way of avoiding it!

'My mother will not write herself, but she bids me ask, had we not better now accept the invitation of Valentinian, and retire to Rome? We have gold enough remaining for a long time to come, and in the Western empire we have powerful friends—but then we are farther from you, beloved. Nevertheless, what you advise, that we will do.

'Already, one of those weary seven years of your captivity has passed away; but oh! if I look back to the time when we parted after the terrible days we spent by the Danube, the space between seems interminable. Many and many a year appears crowded into that one; and yet it is vacant, filled with nothing but the tedious passing of empty hours, absent from him I love. It is like looking over the sands of the desert, one long, unvaried, interminable waste, with but one bright spot of verdure in the midst of the desolation, the few short hours that you passed with us during the autumn. Blessed and happy, indeed, are those hours, ever embalmed in memory. They were in their passing a dream of delight, and now, even in recollection, they serve as an antidote to all the cares and sorrows of the present!

'Yet those seven years will reach their end; and I shall see you again, and once more lean my head upon your bosom, and hear your voice, and tell you all my thoughts. Let them fly, let them fly quickly, though they may be taken from the brightest season of our life; yet if the spring be without sunshine, well may we long for the summer.

'Farewell!'

Theodore pressed the letter to his lips, to his heart. Her hand had touched it, her spirit had dictated it; and the very sight of those beloved characters was balm to his bosom. The news she told, however, was painful; the danger that she apprehended great, if the rumours on which her fears were raised had themselves any foundation in truth.

Without hesitation, Theodore took his way at once to the dwelling of Attila, and was admitted to the presence of the king.

The monarch's brow was gloomy, but he received the Roman youth with tenderness. 'What wouldst thou, my son?' he said,

'Thou hast had letters, I find, from the land of the Alani. Do they bear thee good tidings? Thy face is sad.'

'They say that the chiefs of the Alani fear the wrath of Attila,' replied Theodore boldly.

'They have cause!' answered the monarch sternly—'they have cause! but if thou wouldst send any letters back, prepare them quickly, for by to-morrow's noon the messengers return, and some of mine own accompany them.'

'I would fain ask a boon,' replied Theodore, anxiously. 'In the land of the Alani, as thou well knowest, oh mighty monarch, I have those whom I love better than life itself. If thine arms, victorious as they ever have been, are now destined to be turned against the Alani, I would fain visit those dear friends, and provide for their safety. They are but women and children, and cannot protect themselves.'

'Thou canst not go, my son,' replied Attila. 'Thou goest with me wherever my steps are directed. Thus have I resolved for thy sake, as well as for mine own. When last thou wert absent, dangers, and well-nigh death, befell thee! The same may occur again. Bleda is dead; but even for thy sake Attila could not slay a son. Thou understandest well that which I mean. Whilst thou art with me, thou art safe; but amongst distant tribes such is not the case. There, thy death might be accomplished without leaving a trace to tell me how. I know not yet whether the Alani are to be crushed as a swarm of wasps, or hived as bees. It depends upon themselves. Let them obey Attila, and they are safe; but at all events, I go towards the western seas; and though Italy will not be visited, some of my hosts may sweep the mountains as they advance. It were better that they were not encountered by women—women such as these, who, I have heard from those who went with thee thither, are exceeding beautiful. Bid them remove to some other land. They dare not, I think you tell me, return to Illyria on account of the base, weak Theodosius; but if thou wilt, I will issue my commands to that throned slave, to receive them with friendship and favour. He dare not disobey!'

'Thanks, oh great king!' replied Theodore; 'but willingly we will not tread that land again, so long as he is emperor. Valentinian, however, in the West, offers them peace and protection. Thither will I send them, if, indeed, I may not see them ere they go. I fear not any danger to myself.'

'It must not be,' said Attila, in a tone that left no reply. 'Thou must go with me; but I promise thee that, this expedition over, thou shalt have permission to visit them in that great pile of stones which you Romans call the capital of the world, and shall abide with them longer than thou didst before. In Rome thou wilt be safe; but I could not trust thy life in barren mountains and passes which would defy our search. The word of Attila is given: thou shalt visit them in Rome! and my promise, like thine, my son, can never be violated.'

'I thank thee, oh Attila,' replied Theodore—'I thank thee; and feel that thou art generous. So they be safe, and free from harm, I am content to abide with thee.'

'They shall be safe,' replied Attila; 'for my messengers to Valentinian shall command him to respect them as the children of his master; and the Alani shall have orders to guard them on their journey into the Roman state. Now hie thee hence, and write thy letter—a weary task, I should think it! What need have men with letters? Was not speech enough? But they must still add to what the gods give them; and all their additions do but spoil heaven's gifts.'

Theodore took his leave and withdrew; and going back to his dwelling, he called one of his attendants, saying, 'Haste thee to Constantius, the Roman secretary of the king; ask him to send me parchment, and reeds and ink, or if he have no vellum, let him send papyrus.'

The materials for writing were soon brought to him; and sitting down by the fresh trimmed lamp, Theodore spent the next four hours of the night in pouring forth to Ildica all the feelings of his heart.

### THE REPLY.

'I have not come, oh dearest, and most beautiful, I have not sent, because to do either was impossible; and even now, my prayer has been refused, when I petitioned Attila to let me go, in order to guard thee from difficulty and danger. He gives me the means, however, of sending thee this letter; and although it will soon cause the distance between us to be increased, yet gladly and eagerly do I seize the opportunity of bidding thee fly from the land of the Alani, ere it become dangerous for thee to tarry. Fly, my Ildica, bid our mother fly as speedily as may be; for although the anger of Attila towards the nation with whom thou dwellest may be appeased, yet the myriads of the Huns are arming for some distant expedition, and he himself has said, that a part of the host take their way by the Norican Alps. On their course in danger and destruction; and even where they come as friends, perils not small, to all whom they approach, precede and accompany their march.

'Oh that I could be with thee, to guide and guard thy footsteps! Oh that I could be with thee, to shelter thee in my arms, from every danger and from every injury! But it must

not be! and I must bid thee go farther from me, quit the calm retreat, where even in exile we have known together some of our brightest hours of uninterrupted joy, and plunge into the crowd of a wide, vicious, luxurious city, where thousands will strive to efface the memory of the absent from thy heart; where thousands will strive to win the hand that has been promised unto me; where thousands will deem thy beauty and thy love prizes to be won by any means, conquests to be made by any falsehood.

'Yes, my Ildica, thou must fly to Rome; and yet I bid thee do so without one fear, that any thought or any feeling of her I love will be estranged from me by absence, that her affection will be diminished by any art of others to win it for themselves, or that her heart will not be as wholly mine when next we meet as when last we parted. If I know my Ildica aright, and judge not Rome too harshly, the capital of the empire will be but a wide desert to her, who has no feelings in common with its degenerate and voluptuous inhabitants. Ravenna itself would be worse; and I grieve that it is so, for my Ildica's sake, knowing well, that even were the best and the brightest of other days assembled round her, they could not steal one feeling of her heart from the first grateful object of her young but steadfast love.

'Go, then, to Rome, by Ildica! and, amidst the best of those who still remain, thou mayest, perhaps, find some, who will cheer thine hours during our separation, some, whose example and advice may be necessary and salutary, both to Eudochia and to Ammian. Long, I fear, alas! too long, will be that separation; for although Attila has fixed a time at which I may once more fly to see thee, yet that time is named as the end of the expedition on which he is now about to set out; and it is only in the knowledge of one all-seeing Being how long that expedition may continue, or whither it may lead.

'Still, however, it is a bright hope, a hope that will cheer me and console me, though it may make the day seem long, and the hours fly heavily, till they dwindle down to the moment of my glad departure. Of what may intervene, I will think the best: dangers may happen, sorrows may befall; but I will not anticipate either the one or the other, and will only think that every hour which passes only serves to bring nearer the time of our re-union.

'What I most fear is, that the arms of Attila are about to be turned against some part of our native land; for where indeed could he lead his hosts without meeting some portion of the Roman Empire? He demands, too, that I should accompany him; but be assured, sweetest Ildica, that the hand of Theodore will never be armed against the land of his fathers; and though, as a Roman, I feel that I should be justified in striking to the earth the head of a tyrant, or of a tyrant's favourite, by whom my father was unjustly doomed to die, there is a difference between the country and its oppressor. I might be a Brutus, but I would never be a Coriolanus. If I go with Attila, and if his arms are turned against the empire, I may go as a spectator to the war; but let it be remembered—and oh, Ildica, make it known, wherever a Roman ear will listen—that I go against my will, and as a captive; that I leave my sword behind me in these wars; that my shield is hung up by the hearth I quit in this barbarian land; and that if I fall amidst the events which may now ensue, I fall without dishonour.

'Let me turn, now, to sweeter thoughts; let me think of some dearer theme. I have dreamed, I have fancied, that after this expedition is over, perchance Attila may abridge the period of my captivity, and permit me to return, and at the altar of our God claim my Ildica as my own for ever. Oh, beloved! how my heart beats even when I think of that hour, when I think of the moment that shall make thee mine—mine beyond the power of fate itself—mine through life and through eternity—united unto me by bonds that nothing can sever—wife of my bosom—mother of my children—one, one with me in every thought, in every feeling—in hopes, in fears, in joys, and sorrows, one! Oh, Ildica! what were heaven itself, could we but think that dear bond, that tie which binds the soul itself, could be burst even by the hand of death. Oh, no! I will not believe it, that even in another life I shall not know, and see, and love thee still; that purified, perhaps, and elevated, calmed down and tranquillised from the agitating fire that thrills through every vein when I but think of thee, the same intense affection which I now feel shall not survive the tomb, and become one of the brightest parts of a brighter state of being. Yes, Ildica, yes, it shall be so! Those who doubt it, know not what love is; for oh, surely, if there be feelings in this life at all that deserve to be immortal, it is those which would make us sacrifice life itself, and all that life can give, for another.

'Thou thinkest of me, Ildica; yes, I know thou thinkest of me. My heart is a witness for thine, that not an hour of the dull day passes without some thought of those we love; and it is strange, oh, how strange! that out of objects which have no apparent connection with such images, the idea of her I love is brought before my mind, and my heart, like the bee, draws the honey of those sweet associations from everything it finds. If, when hunting in the neighbouring woods, the sweet breath of the wild cherry blossom is wafted

past me by the wind, the image of Ildica, I know not why, rises up instantly before imagination ; and every sweet perfume of the odorous flowers seems to gain an additional fragrance from the associations that they call up. If the singing of the spring birds strikes mine ear, do not the tones of that dear voice come back upon memory, and thrill through my inmost heart? Everything is lost in thee; nothing that I admired, or loved, or delighted in before, seems now to have any separate existence in my eyes, but is all beheld with some reference to her I love.

'Oh, Ildica! do we not love each other better for all the anxieties and cares which have surrounded the first days of our affection? If so, let us not regret them, for they have been stern but kind-hearted friends, who may have chastised our youth, but have left us an inestimable treasure ere they departed: yes, inestimable, indeed, for there are gems to adorn existence, as well as to ornament the body ; and the brightest of all the diamonds of the heart's treasury is love such as I feel for thee.

'Tell Flavia that I love her as her son ; and tell her all I feel for thee. It will be more pleasant unto her ear than aught I could say unto herself. Bid her not mourn more than needs must be to return to Rome—the city which she knew in days of happiness—now that so much of that happiness has passed away. Bid her cheer herself with hope, for the clouds are beginning to break away ; and the sun may soon shine once more, if not for her as bright as ever, yet with a tranquil splendour that will refresh her heart.

'Cast thine arms round Eudochia, and kiss her with love for her brother's sake, telling her how deeply and bitterly he regrets that he is not permitted to guard her youth, and foster her beauty and her virtues, till a husband's hand took from his own the task. Greet Ammian, too, with love, telling him that he must curb his wild spirit, and keep all his courage, and all his energies, to protect those whom God has placed under his charge, and left without other safeguard.

'One word more, my beloved, to end this long epistle. Doubt not that at Rome you will find protection, for you have it from one whom you have seen, but hardly know—from one so mighty, however, that, alas! experience shows, even Rome herself must tremble at his frown. Attila protects you ; and unto Valentinian he has sent a message to respect you and yours, as if you were his children. The weak and corrupt monarch that Rome must obey dare as soon neglect this warning as fall upon his sword. The Alani, too, have orders to conduct you safely to the Roman territory. Oh, that every step should thus bear you farther from me!

'As I cannot see thee, as I cannot embrace thee, I would willingly write to thee for ever. But it must come to an end. Farewell, sweet Ildica! farewell, my beloved! Remember me still, as heretofore! Love me ever! Love me as well as I love thee! I ask—I can have—no better love. Farewell, again and again farewell!'

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### THE BATTLE.

We must pass over the events of some months, and change the scene to the heart of France.

In the vast plains between the Seine and the Marne, where the eye can roam unobstructed over many a mile of open country, runs a brook of the clearest water, which, wandering on through vineyard and cornfield, joins the latter river not far from Soulanges.

At the time I speak of, however, no corn spread over that wide plain, no vines obstructed the progress of the eye, and nothing but thin low grass, which had sprung up where wheat and oats had been cut down or burned, covered the brown surface of the earth with a robe of autumnal green. A wanderer, who stooped down to bathe his weary brow in that rivulet, had gazed, before he bent his head, upon the wide scene before his eyes, and over the whole plain not a living creature was seen to move. A raven winged its slow flight across the sky, but that was the only sign of life which the keenest eye could discover. When the wayfarer raised his head, however, and gazed again, a brown shadow seemed to lie upon the land near the horizon, and, mounting upon the base of a ruined landmark, he saw that dull shade creeping onward towards him. He looked up to the sky to see if it were a cloud, which, borne by the wind, might interrupt the light of the sun ; but over the whole heaven was spread a thin filmy vapour, which intercepted all the stronger rays.

He gazed again, and the shadow seemed to assume the form of a wide range of heathy bushes blown about by the air. Still the cloud advanced, and gradually spreading, like a high wave, seen rushing in a long bending line over the shore, it came forward across the plains, stretching out as far as the eye could reach. Distinct and more distinct at length the brown masses raised themselves above the earth, and in the end innumerable horsemen might be seen advancing with a slow pace from the westward. A cry of terror burst from the weary wanderer, and he fled as fast as his limbs would bear him. Ere half an hour had passed, the war-horse of Attila pawed the ground beside the fallen landmark, and the myriads of the Huns spread out over all the plain.

'Let the ground before me be cleared,' cried the king; and then, poising his javelin above his head, he cast it forward with prodigious strength. A hundred cubits farther than any other arm could throw, it still sang on through the air, then touched the earth, and quivered in the ploughed-up ground.

'There pitch my tent,' continued Attila; 'there fix our camp. Turn all faces back towards the west, for Attila has retreated far enough, and here we have space to wheel our horses on the foe. Oh Theodoric! Theodoric! thou hast deceived and betrayed thy friend. I offered to make thee a king indeed, instead of a puppet in the hands of Rome; but Ætius with his loud promises, and Avitus with his fair flattery, have seduced thee to the side of Attila's enemies, and ere two days are over either he or thou must die. Had it not been for thee and thy Goths, the Romans of Gaul, like the Romans of the East, had been now crouching in trembling terror at the feet of Attila. But they shall still tremble! Shall it not be so, oh Valamir? Will not thy subjects dye their hands in the blood of their degenerate kinsmen? Shall it not be so, Arderic? Will not thy Gepidæ smite the heads of the vain loquacious Franks? Attila will beard the Roman, and even here shall be the spot. Make the camp strong, and let no one sit apart from the rest. Let the wagons be placed around, and the spaces beneath them filled up, and leave no entrance but one; for if we destroy not this Roman army in the field, we will wait it in our camp, and by the head of my father I will not quit the land till it is dispersed. Bid the wise men and the diviners sacrifice, and consult the bones of the slain, that I may know what will be the event of to-morrow. Tell them that we fight, even if we die. Let them speak the truth, therefore, boldly. Ha! Theodore, my son, ride hither with me.'

The young Roman spurred on his horse at the monarch's command, and rode on beside him while he surveyed the field. Theodore, however, was not armed, and he only feared that Attila might be about to ask him some question in regard either to the Roman discipline, or the arrangements of his own troops for battle, to answer which he might feel incompatible with his duty to his country. But Attila, as he proceeded, gave directions to the various leaders who followed him, interrupting, from time to time, for that purpose, his conversation with the young Roman, which turned to a very different theme.

'Those diviners,' he said, 'I have no trust in them. Would that we had here that holy man from the mountains beyond the Teïssa! Then should we have some certainty in regard to the result of to-morrow's battle. Dost thou know, my son, what are the means which the Christian augurs use to learn the future as they do?—Valamir, my friend,' he continued, turning to the king of the Ostrogoths, 'seest thou yon mound, the only one which interrupts the eye as it wanders towards the east. Though that mound be scarcely bigger than a great ant-hill, much may depend upon it—even the fate of the battle,' he added, in a low voice. 'We will range our host along this brook, at the distance of two hundred cubits; the hill will be before us, but let it be seized ere the strife commences.—Say, Theodore, knowest thou how the Christian augurs are accustomed to divine?'

'The Christians have no augurs, oh Attila!' replied Theodore. 'There have been, and there are, prophets amongst them, to whom is revealed, by God himself, some of the events that are to come.'

'That is but a pretence,' answered Attila. 'We judge by the bones of the victims: other nations by their entrails. Some divine by the sand, some by the lightning, some by the flight of birds; but all who have any knowledge of the future, gain it from some manifest sign. So must it be with the Christian augurs; but they conceal their knowledge, lest others should learn it, and be as wise as they are.—Arderic, my friend and wise counsellor, place thyself early upon the right. Thou wilt never fly nor bend, I know, but let us all be calm in the hour of battle. Let not rage and rashness make us forget that victories are as often won by calm and temperate skill as by impetuous daring. Lo! yonder come the Romans! I would fain that they should not live another night on the same earth with Attila; but it is too late to destroy them to-day. I will not look upon them, lest I be tempted over-much.—What say the diviners?' he continued, turning to an attendant who came running up from a spot where a large fire had been hastily lighted.

'I know not, mighty king!' replied the slave; 'but the sacrifice is over, and they come to seek thee.'

Attila paused, and waited, while a crowd of Huns and slaves, all eager to hear the announcement, came forward, accompanying the diviners. They, unlike the Roman augurs of a former time, were dressed in no graceful robes; but, covered simply with the rude garments of the Scythians, they were only distinguished from the rest of the Huns by a wilder and fiercer appearance. As they came near, however, Attila dismounted from his horse; and the diviners, approaching with less reverence than the rest of his people displayed towards him, the elder of the party addressed him boldly.

'Hear, oh Attila!' he said—'Hear what the gods pronounce by the bones of the victims! Of the result of the battle we know

nothing, and therefore we cannot promise you the victory; but we know that the leader of your enemies shall die in the strife. To-morrow's sun shall rise upon him living, and set upon him dead. We have spoken what we know.'

'Ætius shall die, then!' said Attila. 'So let it be! But can ye say nothing farther? Can ye not tell which will be successful in to-morrow's strife?'

'We had no answer,' replied the diviner with a gloomy look—'the gods left it doubtful.'

'They left it to our own valour, then!' cried Attila, in a voice of triumphant confidence. 'Our hearts and our arms shall make it no longer doubtful.—Lo! yon Romans still advance over the plain. They must not come too near us.—Arderic, let thy Gepidæ recross the stream and insure that the enemy do not approach within a hundred bow-shots.—Theodore, wouldst thou leave me, my son?' he added, seeing the young Roman's eyes turned with a look of natural interest upon the advancing legions of Ætius—'wouldst thou leave me, my son? If so, Attila gives thee leave to go. I fear not that there should be one brave man added to yon mighty host of cowards. I have saved thy life, I have loved thee well, I have treated thee as my child; but if thou wouldst leave Attila, at such a moment as this, thou shalt go in peace.'

Theodore sprang to the ground and kissed the hand of the monarch. 'I will not quit thee, oh Attila!' he said—'I seek not to quit thee, and of all times I would not quit thee now. Fight against my native land, I cannot; but through to-morrow's field I will ride unarmed by the side of Attila, and defend him as far as may be from every danger in the strife. I am grateful, oh mighty king! for all your favours: I love you for all your kindness and all your noble qualities; and doubt me not, I beseech you, for though I fight not on your part, none will be more faithful to you than I will. Oh, doubt me not!'

'I do not doubt you,' answered Attila; 'but let us to our camp.'

Difficult were it to describe, impossible to convey any adequate idea of the scene of tumult, din, and confusion, which the camp of the Huns presented during that night. The circle of wagons placed in a double row, and forming in reality a strong fortification, was nearly completed, when Attila led the way thither, and turned his steps towards his own tent. Fastened to strong stakes driven into the ground, between the inner wheels, the wagons were immovable from without, but easily turned or withdrawn from within; and embracing an immense extent of ground, they afforded space for the mighty host, which Attila had led into the plains of Gaul.

During that night, and comprised in a space of a few miles, more than a million of human beings, either in the Hunnish or the Roman army, prepared for battle, and panted for carnage. No still quiet followed in the train of night: the blows of the hammer and the mallet, the ringing of armour, the voices of guards and commanders, the tramp of thousands passing to and fro, the murmur of innumerable voices, the loud and ringing laugh, the war-song shouted high and strong, the sounding of trumpets, and of wild martial music, the neighing of several millions of horses,* raised a roar through the whole air, in the midst of which the sounds of an accidental conflict, that took place between the troops of Arderic and those of Theodoric, the Gothic ally of Ætius, were scarcely heard; though so fierce was the struggle for the bank of the rivulet, that fifteen thousand men were left dead within a stone's throw of the Hunnish camp.

Thus passed the night; and early on the following morning Attila appeared at the door of his tent, and was soon surrounded by the different leaders of the nations under his command. His countenance was serene and bright; and the attendants who had passed the night in his tent, declared that he had slept as calmly as an infant, from the moment that he lay down his head to rest, to the moment that he woke to battle. Calmly and tranquilly he asked the tidings of the night; and in a brief conversation with the leaders, assigned to every one his proper post, and pointed out the great objects to be striven for in the coming conflict. Towards the third hour after day-break, one of the watchers before the camp of the Huns announced that they saw movements in the Roman camp; and Attila, instantly springing on his horse, led forth his troops himself through the single aperture which had been left for that purpose. Two hours more elapsed ere the whole of that mighty host were in array; but then, to any eye looking along over the wide plain, strange and fearful must have been the sight, yet grand and magnificent.

On one side of that little brook, running pure and clear, between those hostile armies—like the bright stream of divine love, pouring on its refreshing waters of peace amidst the strife and turbulence of human passions—stretched forth the host of Attila, nearly seven hundred thousand horsemen from every land and every nation of the North. There, in the centre, under his own immediate command, appeared the dark line of dusky Huns, little embarrassed with defensive armour, but bearing the

* The armies of Attila were always followed, we are told, by an immense number of spare horses, besides those which bore his warriors, and those which were attached to the wagons.

strong and pliant bow upon their shoulders, and at their side the quiver loaded with unerring arrows; the large heavy sword, too, was in the hand of each, and at many a stirrup of the wilder tribes hung as an ornament a gory human head. Far on the right appeared the Gepidæ, fairer in complexion, more bulky in limb, and more splendid in arms and apparel, but generally reputed less active, less fierce, and less persevering than the Huns. On the left, again, were seen the Ostrogoths, tall, fair, and powerful; and the intervening spaces were filled up with a thousand barbarous tribes—the Rugi, the Geloni, the Heruli, the Scyrri, Burgundians, Turingians, and those called the Bellonoti. A thousand tongues were spoken in that host, a thousand varieties of face and garb were seen, but all were actuated by the same feelings—hatred to the Romans, and reverence for the mighty Hun.

On the other side of the brook, again, appeared, not less in number, and not less various in appearance, the vast army which Ætius had collected from the different nations that inhabited Gaul; the long-haired Frank, the blue-eyed Goth, the sturdy Armorican, the powerful, but doubtful Alan; and there, upon his right, appeared Theodoric, the wise and valiant monarch of the Visigoths, with his white hair, speaking the passing of many a careful year, and his three gallant sons, ready to obey, with the activity of youth, those directions which the wisdom of his age might dictate. In the centre were placed all the more doubtful allies of the Roman Empire, mingled with such as might act as a check upon their wavering faith. On the left of the line appeared the Roman eagles, under the command of Ætius in person. There, too, might he be seen, in the eyes of the whole army, riding from rank to rank, and with bold and cheerful words encouraging his soldiers, and exciting them to great exertion. Small in person, but graceful, well-proportioned and active, with the lion heart of the hero, and the eagle glance of the great general, the whole aspect of Ætius breathed courage, and inspired energy. Wherever he rode, wherever he appeared, a cheerful murmur greeted him; and when at length he galloped his splendid battle-horse along the line, and riding up to Theodoric, embraced the old chieftain without dismounting from his charger, a loud and universal shout burst from the army, and seemed to the ears of the Romans a presage of victory.

Calm, grave, and immovable, sat Attila upon his black charger, a stone's throw before the line of the Huns. On him every eye in his own host was turned; and in that moment of awful suspense which precedes the closing of two mighty powers in the first shock of battle, the barbarian myriads seemed to forget the presence of their Roman adversaries in the intense interest with which they regarded their terrible leader. Armed, like themselves, with a bow upon his shoulder, and a sword in his hand, Attila sat and gazed upon his forces, turning from time to time a casual glance upon the Romans, and then looking back along the far extending line of Huns, while a scarcely perceptible smile of triumphant anticipation hung upon his lip.

He sat almost alone, for his nearest followers and most faithful friends remained a few paces behind; while, with that stern, proud glance, he ran over his often victorious bands, and seemed waiting with tranquil confidence for the approaching strife. At length, all seemed prepared on every side, and the stillness of expectation fell upon the field. It continued till it seemed as if all were afraid to break it, so deep, so profound, grew that boding silence.

Slowly turning his horse, Attila rode back towards the centre of the Hunnish cavalry, and then, with a voice so clear, so distinct, so powerful, that its deep rolling tones are said to have reached even the Roman lines, he exclaimed, 'Unconquerable race, behold your enemies! I strive not to give you confidence in me or in yourselves. Here is no new leader, no inexperienced army. Well do you know how light and empty are the arms of the Romans. They fly not with the first wound, but with the first dust of the battle! Fearing to meet you unsupported, and remembering, that where Romans have encountered Huns, the Romans have fallen like corn before the reaper, they have called to their aid degenerate tribes, who have taken shelter in the vicious provinces of Rome, after having been expelled from amongst the native Goths, from the Gepidæ, the Heruli, the Alani. These, whom we have driven from amongst us—these, weak, corrupted, degraded as they are—form the bulk, supply the strength, afford the courage of the army before you. Behold them as they stand! Are they not as one of their own fields of corn, which we have a thousand times trodden down beneath our horses' feet? We are no weak husbandmen, that we should fail to reap such a harvest as that. On warriors, on! Pour on upon the Alani! Break through the degenerate Goths! At the sound of our horses' feet, the Roman eagles, as is their custom, will take wing, and fly; and yon dark multitude shall disappear like the mist of the morning! Why should fortune have given unto the Huns innumerable victories, if not to crown them all with this successful day? On, warriors, on! Drink the blood of your enemies! Let the wounded, in dying, strike his javelin through his foe, and no one dare to die, ere he have brought

a Roman head to the ground. I tread before you the way to victory ; and if any one follow not Attila, he is already dead !'

A loud acclamation burst from the nearer ranks, and ran along all the line of the Huns, while even those who had not heard, poured forth their own clamorous applause of the words which they fancied had been spoken ; and the clang of arms dashed violently together, mingled with the deafening shout that rose up from the barbarian host.

'Seize on yon hill, Valamir !' cried Attila, while the roar continued ; 'it should have been done before.'

The monarch of the Ostrogoths hastened to obey : but scarcely had his troops been put in motion, when a corresponding movement was seen upon the part of the Romans ; and the terrible strife of that day—the most fierce, the most sanguinary that Europe ever has seen—was commenced by the struggle for that low hill, between the two rival tribes of Goths.

For a time the rest of both armies remained unmoved, as if spectators of the combat ; but rage and emulation increased in their bosoms every moment as they gazed, and at length it became impossible for the leaders on either part to restrain in their troops the burning thirst for battle. On poured the Huns upon the Romans ; on rushed the Romans on the Huns. The whirling masses of the Scythian horsemen, enveloped in a cloud of dust, from which shot forth a hail of arrows, passed through and through the ranks of the enemy, casting themselves in vain upon the firm legions of Ætius, scattering the Franks and the Sicambres, sweeping down whole ranks of the Alani and the Goths. On, in heavy line, with their long spears lowered, poured the multitude of the Gepidæ, bearing slaughter and confusion wherever they came.

But still Theodoric and his Goths maintained the hill ; still Ætius and his legions fought unconquered on the plain ; still the Franks and the Alani, knowing that valour alone could save them, continued the combat against the Huns. Hour after hour passed by ; rank after rank was mowed down ; the rivulet, late so pure and clear, flowed onward, one unmingled stream of blood ; and the feet of the Hunnish horses, as they charged again and again the confused, but unsubdued, masses of the Romans, splashed up a gory dew from the pools that lay unabsorbed upon the loamy soil. So great, so terrible was the slaughter, that the horses could scarcely keep their feet amongst the bodies of the dead and dying. Each waving sword dismissed some erring spirit to its last account ; each footfall trampled on the writhing limbs of some mangled fellow-creature.

In the foremost ranks of battle, wherever danger was pre-eminent, wherever the foes remained unbroken, wherever the carnage was most intense, there was seen Attila ; and wherever he appeared, there for the time was victory obtained. Through the whole of that day, too, Theodore was by his side ; and for the second time he saw upon him what his followers not unaptly called 'the spirit of the battle.' Though prompt and clear in every command, keen and ready to seize every advantage, the calm and moderate sternness of his demeanour was gone ; and, fierce as the lion of the wilderness, rapid as the leven bolt of heaven, remorseless and unsparing as the hurricane, he swept on. No one stood before him for an instant ; no one was struck a second time ; but wherever an adversary crossed his path, there was left, at a single blow, a disfigured corpse upon the ground ; or else his horse's feet trampled out the faint sparks that his sword had left.

Death seemed to march before him against his enemies, nor ever turned to approach himself ; and only twice, when surrounded almost on every side by the foe, could Theodore interpose to parry with an iron truncheon, which was the only weapon that he bore throughout the day, the blows of a spear and a javelin, which were aimed at the monarch's throat. The young Roman knew not that he had seen the service rendered ; but at length, when the day was far spent, Ellac, his eldest son, crossed the path of the monarch, saying, 'Ride not in the battle with the Roman, oh my father ! He is of the country of our enemies, and may kill thee when thy back is turned. Let me slay him even now, lest the traitor destroy thee !'

'He has saved my life twice this day !' cried Attila, urging forward his horse. 'Out of my way !' he continued, seeing that his son still stood before him. 'Out of my way ! or, by the God of battles, I will send thee to the land of spirits ! Out of my way !'—and he raised his sword over his son's head, as if about to cleave him to the jaws.

Ellac saw that the moment was not his ; and, reining back his horse, he sought another part of the field, while Attila pursued his career, and strove, but strove long in vain, to obtain possession of the hill. At length, as the closing day waxed faint and dim, and the grey shade of evening, falling over the whole bloody scene, announced that the battle must soon close, or be prolonged into the night, Attila for a moment gained the summit of that long-contested eminence, and slew with his own hand the last of the Gothic warriors, whose especial charge had been to defend that post. Up to that instant he had rushed on, like a devouring flame, leaving nothing but ashes behind him ; but there he suddenly paused, gazed forth upon the confused and

mingled masses of the Huns and Romans, that, with equal success, and very nearly equal numbers, were seen spread over the plain for many miles around. He then lifted his eyes towards the sky, marked the dim grey that mingled with the blue, and the bright star of evening betokening that the brighter sun was gone; and with a sudden calmness said, in a low tranquil voice, 'It is too late for victory to-night! It is too late!—Let the trumpets be sounded!' he continued, to some of those who followed—'Let the trumpets be sounded, to recall all men to the camp! Gather together the ten nearest squadrons upon this slope! The Romans, I think, have had enough of strife to-day, and will not seek it farther; but they have fought well for once, and Attila must defend his own, while they seek a place of repose for the night.'

He added some farther orders; and in a few minutes was heard, from the Hunnish camp, the sound of trumpets giving forth the peculiar notes of recall with which the Huns and other barbarous nations were acquainted; and, separating themselves gradually but securely from the masses of the Romans, the various tribes which had followed Attila to that bloody battle were seen moving, in firm and regular order, towards their camp.

What would have been the result of this movement, under other circumstances, it is difficult to say, had the eyes of Ætius marked the proceedings of the Huns, or the mind of Theodoric directed the movements of the enemy; but trampled under the horses' feet, not far from the spot where Attila then sat, lay the disfigured body of the Gothic king, and the Roman general was far away, embarrassed with a party of the Gepidæ, by whom he had nearly been taken.

The inferior commanders of the Roman host gladly perceived that a battle, of which they were beginning to despair, was not entirely lost; and seeing the dark cloud of Huns, with which Attila on the hill covered the manœuvres of his troops, they dared not act any very vigorous part, with thinned and exhausted troops, against so bold and well-prepared an enemy. The trumpets of Attila continued to sound for two hours after nightfall: his forces entered the camp unmolested, and the last of the host who quitted the battle-plain was the monarch of the Huns himself.*

* Such I believe to be the real history of this famous contest. We derive all our knowledge of the particulars from the Goths and Romans, as the Huns were not historians, or at least did not write their own version of the events in which they were engaged. Even in the present age, when both parties do not scruple to render their pretensions to success on such occasions permanent, how often do we see a battle lost claimed by the loser as a battle won! and, of course, it is more likely to have been so when there was no check found in a counter statement. The historians, however, suffer one or two important facts to appear, which prevent us from believing that Ætius and Theodoric obtained a victory over Attila on the present occasion. In the first place, it is clear that the immense Roman and Gothic army dispersed itself immediately after the battle in which Theodoric was killed. Reasons have been assigned for this proceeding, which are in themselves improbable and unsatisfactory; but which, when coupled with the fact that Attila afterwards sacked Langres and Besançon, and with the strong reasons which exist for believing that Ætius himself retreated at once into the Lyonnaise, render the victory of the Romans somewhat more than doubtful. It seems to me very clear that the battle may have had an indecisive termination, but that Ætius, finding that the Goths and Franks could not be induced to try the fortunes of another day against Attila, retreated himself in haste towards Italy; while Attila, whose loss had been very great, proceeded by a new road towards his own land, ravaging the country, and taking several very important towns in his way. The very words of Jornandes admit that Attila was but little depressed by the event of the battle, and imply that his after-march was still as in a career of victory. Nor is there the slightest proof, that I have been able to discover, that Ætius, as some have declared, followed the monarch of the Huns even at a distance.

If such were the way that the Romans and Goths employed a victory, they must have been moderate and generous indeed; and, under such circumstances, it might be doubtful whether they did not treat their enemies more mildly than their friends. The character of Ætius is represented, by his panegyrists, on the present occasion (probably to screen him from the disgrace of defeat), in a very singular and not creditable point of view. He cheated both the Goths and the Franks, we are told, in order to get rid of them; and then, when left alone with Attila, escorted his great enemy quietly out of Gaul, suffering him to sack and destroy what cities he pleased as he went. Is this reasonable? Is this probable

## CHAPTER XXX.

### THE RETREAT.

'LET the dead be numbered!' said Attila, as he entered his tent—'Let the dead be numbered! I have lost many of my children! Let every chieftain of every tribe count up their numbers, and tell me how many are wanting. We are brave men, and can look our loss in the face.—Theodore, my son, I thank thee; and I give thee leave, as a Roman, to rejoice that, for the first time, Attila has fought without winning a victory.'

Thus saying, he passed on, and Theodore turned to where his own tents were placed. It had been a day of terrible excitement; and no man probably, in either army, had felt such strange and contending emotions as the young Roman, who, riding by the side of Attila through that terrible conflict, exerted every energy to defend the monarch's life, and yet from his heart wished success unto

his enemies. Though every moment his own person had been in danger—the more, perhaps, because he sought to take the life of none himself—yet, during the day, he had not felt even that slight exciting shade of apprehension which is rather pleasing than otherwise. His whole thoughts had been divided between Attila and the Romans. He had sought most eagerly, and he had found completely, an opportunity of proving his gratitude to the monarch of the Huns for all the great and singular favour which he had displayed towards him.

That gratitude had indeed been great. It is true, he had discovered that Attila had a personal object in the first signs of forbearance which he had shown towards him; but Theodore was not one to scan narrowly the causes of gratitude, or to weigh it out in very fine and accurate scales; and yet, though he would willingly have given his life to save that of the mighty king who had protected and befriended him, he could not find in his heart to wish his fellow-countrymen defeated. Thus he had watched the wavering progress of the fight with an anxious and a beating heart, longing every moment to spring forward and rally the legions when he saw them shaken, or to form again the cohorts broken by the Hunnish cavalry.

The same feelings continued, and agitated him still, after he had re-entered the camp. Throughout the night a low and moaning murmur went up from the plain between the two armies; and when Theodore, raised upon one of the wagons, gazed over that bloody field, as it lay in the tranquil moonlight, he could see amongst the piles of dead, which now broke the flat line of the land, a number of objects moving slowly, and darkening, here and there, those spots where the beams of the calm, bright planet were reflected from heaps of corselets and shining arms. The whole camp around him, except a few solitary warriors keeping guard, seemed now to have fallen sound asleep, wearied out with exertion; and none of the noises of the preceding night broke the stillness of the air. Horses and men, equally tired, uttered no sound; and that low moan, not unlike the sighing of a melancholy wind, was all that interrupted the silence. As Theodore gazed, a step near him made him turn; and the next moment, mounting upon the same part of the rampart on which he had raised himself, Arderic stood by his side, and gazed out in the same direction for some time without speaking.

'What can that faint moan proceed from?' said Theodore, at length. 'You hear it, do you not, noble Arderic? The stream is too small to be heard here!'

'I hear it well,' answered Arderic. 'It is the groaning of the many wounded, I suppose; though I never listened to such a sound before.'

'Nor ever, probably,' said Theodore, 'saw such a field?'

'The world never has seen such till this day!' replied the king of the Gepidæ. 'The number of the dead is fearful. I alone have lost seventy thousand men: so say the leaders of the tribes. Did you not think the enemy seemed to have suffered as much as we had, at the close of the day?'

'Fully!' answered Theodore. 'But is it possible that the sound we hear can proceed from the wounded and dying? It is horrible to think upon!'

'It may be the spirits of the unburied dead mourning over their fate,' replied Arderic. 'But what are yon moving objects? They must be either the Romans come to seek for their friends, or the wounded crawling about amongst the slain. Hark, that cawing! and see, they fly up for a moment into the air!—It is the ravens already at their repast. The carrion-eaters in all lands, the vulture, the worm, and the crow, have cause to be grateful to Attila. On yonder field, I should guess, must lie, either dead or wounded, some half million of men. What a banquet! See, they settle again! and now some wise crow, perched upon a Roman corselet, shall peck, unreproved, the throat of one of those who used to call themselves the masters of the world.'

'Cannot we go forth and aid the wounded?' demanded Theodore. 'It is dreadful to think of leaving them to die.'

'Why so?' demanded Arderic. 'They will be at rest all the sooner. Those who had any strength left have crept into the camp long ago; those who had none, are as well where they are, for neither can they serve us nor we them. It is only a pity that those ravens are not vultures, such as we have in the East: they speedily make the dead and dying one. But, doubtless, there are wolves here too, out of the great forest behind us. They will soon clear away the carrion. I should not wonder if that moaning, which I took for the groans of the wounded, were the well-pleased murmur of the wolves over their unexpected feast.'

'Nevertheless,' said Theodore, 'I should much like to take a small body of men with me, and pick out those we can aid amongst the wounded.'

'What! and have the Romans or the Visigoths upon you, declaring that you were pillaging the dead!' replied Arderic; 'and then I should be obliged to go out to defend you. More Goths, more Huns would come up, and a night battle would finish what a day battle has so well begun. No, no, my young friend; by my counsel and good-will,

not a man shall stir forth from this camp either to-night, or to-morrow, or the day after, so long as yon army lies before us. Our loss is nearly equal now. We are in an enemy's country, where we cannot hope to increase our numbers by a man: they are at home, and probably, ere to-morrow, may receive reinforcements. Could we have crushed them in the battle of yesterday, the whole country would have been ours at once; but as we failed to do that, we must no longer leave them the advantages they possess. Here, in our camp, we must await them, where our defences are as much as half a million more warriors. They cannot starve us, for we have food enough for months, what with our horses and our cattle; and if they attack us boldly, they must be utterly defeated. No, no, Theodore, my friend, no one must leave the camp. Attila, I know, will seek to go forth and destroy them in the open plain; but all voices will be with me, if he asks counsel of any one: and, having asked it, he will take it if we all agree. Now let us to our tents, my friend. After all, these tents are convenient things, though when we first entered the Roman territory as enemies we had none, and despised them as idle luxuries, unworthy of a warrior. Now, not a leader amongst us but has many.'

'So would it be, Arderic, with every other Roman luxury,' replied Theodore. 'What you contemn now, you will learn to tolerate, and at length to like.'

'The gods forbid!' answered Arderic. 'Then will we cut our beards, and call ourselves women.'

'The Romans have not fought like women this day, my friend,' replied Theodore.

'True! true!' replied the other. 'A fair reproof, Theodore! They have fought well, and I did them injustice. Now, good-night, and sleep you well. I was heated, and, to say the truth, somewhat anxious; and I came forth for the cool air, and for something else to think of than *to-morrow*. I have found both, and have also made up my mind, even while gazing upon that plain. Sleep you well!'

Sleep, however, was not known to the eyes of Theodore during that night. He was not yet sufficiently habituated to the mighty trade of war, to see thousands perish, and know that thousands more were lying around in agony, with a calm and unconcerned bosom. He lay down to rest his limbs, but sleep visited not his eyelids. Shortly after dawn he rose and went out before his tent; but the host of the Huns was already up and stirring, and multitudes covered the tops of all the wagons, gazing out over the plain, and towards the Roman encampment. Attila was still within his tent, though his battle-horse stood, caparisoned, by the side of the standard which was planted at the entrance. But Theodore was told that six or seven of the chief leaders were in council within the tent; and, joining himself to a party of Hunnish chiefs, who stood in the open space hard by, he remained waiting, with no slight anxiety, the result of the conference.

At length the curtain of the tent was raised, and Attila, followed by his chief leaders, came forth. But little alteration was visible in his countenance, and yet that alteration had rendered the expression more harsh and severe. He was speaking when he came out, and the deep tones of his powerful voice reached to where Theodore stood.

'If it must be so,' he said, 'why, let it be so. Nor do I say that your counsel is not wise and prudent, though I feel within me the power to crush yon swarm of insects, as I would emmets beneath my feet.—Still, I would spare the people, if it may be so. But let it be remembered that Attila must never be defeated! It is sufficient not to have been victorious; we must die here, or conquer! Let my Huns, with their unerring bows, mount upon the ramparts of the camp. Let the other nations, my friends and allies, stand by to support them; then raise me up a funeral pile before the entrance of this tent. There shall be the bed of Attila, if fortune and the God of battle should desert him! To the ramparts, my friends, to the ramparts! Let no man say that Attila does not yield to wise counsels, even when they are opposed to the most burning desire of his heart.'

With extraordinary celerity, and perfect order, the Huns immediately spread themselves over the long line of chariots which formed the rampart of their camp; and, intermingled with the Gepidæ, and with the spearmen of Valamir, stood prepared, with their bows in their hands, and the arrow resting on the string, to send the winged death amongst the Roman legions, as soon as they should advance to the attack.

Several times during the course of the day bodies of the Roman and Gothic troops were seen whirling about over the plain, and twice a large division advanced very near the Hunnish camp, as if to feel their way towards a general attack. But a hail of arrows darkening the sky, and carrying death and confusion into their ranks, caused them to retreat, even faster than they came; and day closed without the expected attack.

Early the next morning a rumour became prevalent in the Hunnish camp that the Roman army was dispersing; and on examining more accurately, it was found that an immense body of Goths, and another of Franks, had quitted the camp of Ætius before daylight that very morning. Infinite were

now the conjectures throughout the barbarian host as to what would be the conduct of Attila under the present circumstances. It was not soon decided, however. Scouts returning to the camp after having been sent forth to ascertain the movements of the enemy, and reporting that the Goths and the Franks had halted at the distance of a few leagues, after quitting the Roman army, the ramparts of the Huns remained guarded during the whole of that day; and no one was suffered to quit the camp, except some small parties, sent forth to reconnoitre.

Attila only once quitted his tent during the whole day, when the unexpected appearance of a large body of cavalry, supposed to be Goths, on the eastern side of the plain, led to the belief that a general attack was about to take place upon the camp of the Huns. They passed away, however, without approaching; and Attila, returning to his tent, remained in solitude during the rest of the day.

By dawn of the next morning the Romans themselves removed to a greater distance, and towards noon an order was given for the Hunnish army to prepare to march. None knew the direction that they were about to take, none knew what purpose was in the bosom of the king; and when he himself rode forth amongst the troops, not even Arderic, his most familiar friend, was aware of the course they were about to pursue.

A few words announced the intention of the monarch. 'To the south,' he said: 'I will not be farther bearded by these Romans, though they be leagued with all the runaways from the hardy North. On to the south, I say! Let them attack me, if they dare!'

The tone in which he spoke was such as showed no inclination to receive counsel or follow advice, and his orders were instantly obeyed. No obstruction was offered to his march: the Roman army, as a whole, had disappeared; and though from time to time a few small bodies of cavalry was seen upon the right of the Huns, showing that Ætius either followed or accompanied the march of the invaders, yet no attempt was made to bring on a general battle: and when, at the end of a four days' march, the Roman cohorts approached somewhat too near, they were speedily driven back by the Hunnish cavalry.

On the fifth day, towards noon, the towers of a large and important city appeared, crowning the summit of some high hills, round the basis of which the barbarian army had been winding since the morning. Massy walls, close and elevated flanking towers, built from the bowels of the rock on which they stood, announced a well defended fortress, which in the time of Rome's greatest glory might well have been looked upon as impregnable. Nevertheless, no sooner did the eyes of Attila rest upon it, after gazing over the country round, as if to ascertain its capabilities for military manœuvres, than, stretching forth his hand towards Langres, he exclaimed, 'It must fall! Valamir, my friend, lead the troops to the attack. I, with one fourth part of the army, wait upon this gentle slope for the coming of the Roman, if he dare to show himself. Let not the sun set, and see this city in the hands of the enemy.'

Langres fell, and Ætius struck no stroke to relieve it. Some of its inhabitants found means to escape into the recesses of the mountains, and some even hid themselves in various parts of the town, where they were not discovered, but all the rest perished by the sword; and the streets of Langres flowed with human blood. As was very customary with the Huns, it was fired in several places, ere they left it as night fell; but the solidity of the buildings, and the incombustible nature of the materials, saved it from anything but partial destruction, and Attila passed on, without waiting to see that it was utterly consumed.

Besançon shared the same fate as Langres; and on the morning after its destruction Attila gazed from the heights in the neighbourhood, and exclaimed, with a glance of triumph, as he beheld no force on any side, either to watch his progress or oppose his will, 'We are not defeated! Let them write it in their histories, that after a pitched battle, in which five hundred thousand men were slain, Attila rode unrestrained through Gaul, and sacked two of her finest cities before the eyes of Ætius. But they will not write the truth—they will not, they dare not, lest in after ages every boy should spit at their memory. Now we may safely turn our steps towards our native land, lest the winter again set in, as it did when we were coming hither, and bind us with icy chains amidst the fastnesses of the mountains.'

The direction taken by the army was now towards the east; and quitting Gaul, Attila plunged into the passes of the Jura, pausing from time to time amidst the sweet Helvetian valleys, as if he even hoped that the Romans might follow him thither, and once more try the fortune of battle. He who through his life had gone from victory to victory, whose steps had been upon the necks of conquered nations, and whose daily food had been success, had met with a check, had encountered disappointment, had been unsuccessful, if not defeated; and he seemed to thirst for an opportunity of wiping away the only stain, slight as it was, which a thousand battles had left upon his sword. None of his confidence had abandoned him: his reliance on his own mighty genius and daring courage was unshaken: but yet the check received in that undecided battle had wrought a change in

Attila, and that change unfavourable. Ever stern and unyielding, he had now become fierce and irascible; nor was that all: many of the vices of the barbarian character, which had been kept down, and, as it were, overawed in his nature by the greater and more splendid qualities, so long as success had attended him, now seemed like slaves, on the first reverse of their master, to rise up turbulently in his bosom, and threaten to usurp the supreme control.

It was remarked, also, that Attila—fearing, perhaps, that his first want of success might have deprived him of some portion of his vast influence over the minds and hearts of his followers—had become suspicious, wily, exacting in regard to outward reverence, occasionally violent, and often intemperate. He assumed, too, a greater degree of pomp and external magnificence; as if the simple splendour of his powerful mind was sufficiently tarnished by the one slight reverse he had met with, to require the substitution of a meaner sort of majesty, to dazzle the eyes where the heart was unsatisfied.

The change, indeed, was not very great in any one particular, but still enough so, in each, to attract the attention of a person who remarked so closely as Theodore, and, in the aggregate, sufficient to strike the eyes of others. This mood, too, increased in him daily: and as he marched onward, it drew the attention of Arderic himself.

Through those wide beautiful valleys, clad in the everlasting green with which a temperate climate and a happy soil has robed them, the Hunnish cavalry wound on, feeding their horses by the banks of the streams and lakes, which, scattered in bright confusion throughout the free Helvetian land, have rendered it, in all ages, a country of enchanted sights. Through those deep passes, too, clad with the fir and pine, whose evergreen garmenture bore no token of the approaching autumn, the long and dusky troops of barbarian horsemen poured on, lifting, with wild enthusiastic delight, to the mountain, the rock, the rugged precipice, the variegated foliage, and all the beauties of uncultivated nature, those eyes which looked with scorn or abhorrence upon all the productions of civilised art, and on the mighty master works of the human mind.

Every now and then, however, where the beech, or the ash, or the elm, or the oak, was mingled with the unchanging trees of the mountain, the sear aspect of the withering leaves, the tints of yellow and of brown, told Theodore, but too surely, that the autumn was far advanced. The expedition of Attila had now lasted a year and nearly nine months. It was more than that since he had heard the slightest news of Ildica. It was two years since he had seen her he loved: but time could do nothing to diminish feelings such as his; and the longing once more to clasp her to his heart, grew daily stronger and stronger, instead of decreasing. He thought the rapid marches of the army slow and tedious—the way seemed long and interminable.

At length began to appear the wide plains, the dark woods, the broad rivers, which announced once more their approach to the land of the Huns. Their last three days' march, however, was through fallen and falling snow: but Theodore was not to be disheartened; and on the very day that followed their arrival on the banks of the Tibiscus, he claimed audience of Attila, and, reminding him of his promise, demanded permission to set out on his visit to Italy.

The answer was stern and decisive: 'It is impossible!'

The monarch said no more, and Theodore, grieved and disappointed, waited on through a long, dark, tedious winter. With the first blossoms of the spring, however, as the young Roman sat within his dwelling, leaning his head upon his hand, and thinking of the past, the boy Ernac, now growing up in splendid beauty, ran gladly in, exclaiming, 'My father calls for you! Come, Theodore, come! Attila demands your presence; and he is in a milder mood than he has been since his return from Gaul.'

A glad hope passed through the bosom of Theodore, and, rising from his seat, he followed to the presence of the king.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### THE RE-UNION.

ROME, immortal Rome! the capital of the greatest and most despotic of governments, whether democratic, imperial, or clerical, that ever this world has known; the fountain-head of the mightiest and most pervading power that ever has been exercised on earth! Rome, immortal Rome! the heart of the whole world during centuries of glory, from which issued forth, poured through a thousand veins and arteries, the impulses of civilisation to the remotest points of her mighty limbs! Rome, immortal Rome! wonderful in her rise, her duration, and her fall! Wonderful in her splendour, wonderful in her decay! Even when the time shall come, that men pass the ploughshare over her walls, or that the beasts of the field find grass in her desolate dwelling-places, still shall she remain immortal in history and tradition; still shall she walk the earth amongst the spirits of the past, exercising over the destinies of unnumbered ages an unseen influence through the record of her marvellous deeds! Rome, gigantic spectre, still haunting the ruins of the greatest empire

that the world has ever seen! Rome, from which arts, and knowledge, and power, and religion, have bowed to distant ages, as from a source; but which—oh, strange to say!—has ever presented in herself the spectacle of anarchy, vice, and irreligion; and which stood forth from the whole world as the darkest and most polluted spot through many centuries, and for many crimes. Rome, immortal Rome! We must now bend our steps through Rome.

It was on a spring holyday, in one of the brightest months of the year, ere summer had brought her burning heat, and after winter had lost his chilling frown. The vegetable world was all in flower, and nature, like an April bride, was crowned with garlands. The sky was all in smiles; the air was all balm; and the whole of a soft and pleasure-seeking population was pouring forth into the streets, or thronging the public places of the city which had once been, indeed, the queen of empires, and was still majestic, though her reign was over.

Some show, or some amusement, some procession, or some festival, called the gay multitude forth towards the forum; and oh! how merrily, as they went along, did the laugh ring up into the sky—did the gay song, or the loud jest, echo through the streets.

Amongst the many who took their way onwards, through one of the long narrow streets, were two girls carrying a basket of flowers between them, and thus singing as they went of the sweet burden they bore:

FLOWER GIRLS' SONG.

Oh, the flowers of spring! the sweet smelling flowers,
Gay-robed companions of life's happy hours;
They have come again to visit us here;
They have come hand in hand with the young bright year.
Oh, flowers! Buy my flowers!

Oh, the flowers of spring! the beautiful flowers,
In garlands we twined them in infancy's hours;
And every blossom we strung on the wreath
Was like the sweet moments that flew beneath.
Oh, flowers! Buy my flowers!

Oh, the flowers of spring! the beautiful flowers,
They have wreathed the door-posts of love's own bowers;
They have given their breath to the lover's sigh,
And their hues to the loved one's cheek and eye.
Oh, flowers! Buy my flowers!

Oh, the flowers of spring! the beautiful flowers,
Fed with May sunshine, and bathed with spring showers;
When you have babes, as soon you may,
Let them sport with flowers thro' their young bright day.
Oh, flowers! Buy my flowers!

Oh, the flowers of spring! the beautiful flowers,
When manhood puts forth its mightiest powers;
Each noble thing does its wreath require
The warrior's sword and the poet's lyre.
Oh, flowers! Buy my flowers!

Oh, the flowers of spring! the beautiful flowers,
They are dear to us still, when old age lours;
We gaze at the blossoms that spring at our feet,
And the perfume of mem'ry rises sweet.
Oh, flowers! Buy my flowers!

Oh, the flowers of spring! the beautiful flowers,
They have still their charm for all life's hours;
And when at length in the tomb we are laid,
Let our last bed of flowers be made.
Oh, flowers! Buy my flowers!

Oh, the flowers of spring! the beautiful flowers,
Where see you flowers so fair as ours?
They are sweet to the scent, and bright to the eye,
Oh, take them before they fade or die.
Oh, flowers! Buy my flowers!' *

So sung the flower girls, as carrying between them their basket, heavy with the rifled treasures of the spring, they walked on amongst the crowd, selling, from time to time, a wreath or a nosegay. The passers-by, however, unembarrassed with any burden, were more rapid in their movements. The crowd became thinner and thinner, as the more early hurried on. Scattered groups succeeded, hastening forward with an accelerated pace, lest they should be too late, or gain but bad places at the show; and at length the numbers were so much diminished, as to leave the street nearly vacant; while the girls themselves, finding that they had been outstripped by their customers, hurried their pace as fast as they could, in order to find a new market, where the multitudes were assembled.

At the time when the street was the thinnest of people, however, the trampling of horses coming at a quick pace was heard, and both the girls turned round to look, the one exclaiming, 'It is the bishop, I am sure,' and the other replying, 'No, it is the quæstor, by the number of horses: the bishop always goes in his chariot, foolish girl.'

'Wrong, both of us,' rejoined the first; 'it is but a large troop of barbarians.'

'Oh! they will buy our flowers, then,' cried the other. 'I dare say they are from Ætius's army; and the barbarians always spend their money as fast as they get it.'

As they thus spoke, the troop which called

* After writing the above song, a friend suggested to me that it bore a resemblance to some other verses of which we could both recall a part but not the whole. We could neither remember the author's name nor where they were printed; but I have since found, that the poem alluded to is by Mrs. Hemans; and the author of 'Conti,' a work full of interest, enthusiasm, and high feeling, lately pointed out to me that the stanzas are printed amongst the minor poems following 'The Forest Sanctuary.' They commence, 'Bring flowers!' and in two or three of the stanzas there is much similarity with the above.

forth these observations approached; and the two girls—one of them was remarkably pretty, and the other thought herself so—turned their faces, with an air of modesty which it is possible they did not really possess, towards the point straight before them, and taking up again the burden of their song, 'Oh, flowers! Buy my flowers!' they went on carolling gaily, as the strangers came near.

He who rode at their head was a young man of about two-and-twenty, dressed in the Roman costume; but those who followed were clothed, though with some appearance of splendour, in the wilder garb of the Huns. Riding up, the young stranger stopped his horse by the side of the first flower-girl, who instantly held up a bunch of very beautiful blossoms, singing on, with an air of sportive coquetry, 'Oh, flowers! Buy my flowers!' Theodore, for he it was, took the flowers, and gave her a piece of money, saying, at the same time, 'Canst thou tell me, pretty lass, where dwells Julius Lentulus. His house used to be here, methinks; but it is long since I saw it, and where I thought it stood, appears nothing but a high wall.'

'True, beautiful youth,' replied the girl—'true, his house stood there; but Valentinian wanted the land to make a fish-pond of; so he pulled down the house, and Julius Lentulus was obliged to remove, and now dwells farther up, at the side of the Aventine. The emperor, however, betook himself to Ravenna; the fish-pond was never made, and the Edile had the ground walled up; for he dare not give it back to Julius Lentulus for fear of the emperor.'

'Canst thou not direct me more exactly,' demanded Theodore; 'for I wish to find the house instantly.'

'Ay! now I warrant thee,' answered the girl, 'thou art seeking the pretty Eudochia: often does she buy flowers of me when I go by the Aventine. Ay! I warrant thee, some old lover of hers; for I remember when she came back from exile in the barbarian land herself, some two or three years ago. But alas! fair youth, thou hast a rival—Nay, not one, for that matter, but a hundred, though only one that is dangerous.'

'Pray who is that?' replied Theodore, with a smile, which encouraged the girl to run on.

'As fair a youth as any in the imperial city,' answered the girl: 'she calls him her brother Ammian; but once, as I rested in the gardens of their villa without the walls, I saw their lips meet as brothers and sisters' rarely do meet; and I found afterwards that there was no such near blood between them.'

Theodore's cheek reddened from feelings that would be difficult, and are unnecessary, to define. 'Alas, poor youth!' continued the girl—'alas, poor youth, I am sorry for thee! but these things must be borne, sweetheart, and thou wilt soon find thee another bride.'

'Thou art mistaken, pretty lass,' replied Theodore: 'Eudochia is my sister, and Ammian I love as a brother; but have you no news of the lady Flavia and——'

'Ha, ha, I have thee now!' cried the girl; 'thou wouldst ask after the fair Ildica. Thou art safe, then, stranger, thou art safe. She lives as a nun, and keeps her maiden beauties from the searching eyes of admiration. Seldom have I even seen her, but she is very beautiful. Thou wilt find her, too, by the Aventine; and if thou wouldst know where Ammian is, I could tell thee too.'

The girl assumed an air of mystery as she spoke, which excited Theodore's curiosity; and, without appearing to be anxious on the subject, he merely asked, 'And where, pray, is that?'

'I do not know whether I will tell or not,' answered the girl: 'it might cost the pretty boy his life; but thou wilt not repeat it, and may keep him from such follies hereafter. He has gone out,' she added, approaching closer to Theodore's horse, and speaking in a lower tone—'he has gone out to witness secretly a great sacrifice which is to be offered to Jupiter by the people who dwell at the foot of Pincianus: I saw him going thither as I came along; for I heard that the good old pagans—as we Christians call them—were about to risk their throats for the sake of offering a sacrifice to a god in whom they do not half believe, and I went thither to sell my garlands. As we came back, we saw the young wanderer going thither for sport, and we decked him and his horse out with flowers, as if he were verily to be the sacrifice himself.'

'God grant that it may not be so,' thought Theodore; but he merely asked, 'Are not the laws against these sacrifices very severe here in the West? They are so in the Eastern empire at least.'

'Death to every one who witnesses them,' replied the girl; 'but since the emperor has dwelt at Ravenna, people have not been so strict, and one may swear by Jupiter, or even by Venus, without danger. What it will be now that Valentinian has returned, I cannot tell; but I must on to the palace to sell him flowers, for he will soon be going to join the procession, and the præpositus always buys flowers of me and Claudia for the emperor's own use, he tells us.'

Thus saying, she tripped on; while Theodore turned his horse's head towards the Aventine Mount; and on inquiring for the house of Julius Lentulus he was directed to a stately, but somewhat gloomy, edifice, enclosed within its own walls and gardens, and bearing an air of majestic decay, which

harmonised but too well with the state of the city and the country. On reaching the gates he asked at once for Flavia; but the old janitor considered him attentively for some moments, ere he gave him admission, for the person he inquired for received but few visitors.

'What is your name?' he asked—'what is your name, young lord? I am not going to admit you and all these barbarians to the lady Flavia, who rarely sees any one. Then that wild youth Ammian has gone forth, and there is no one but the lady and her daughter within.'

Beyond the great gates stood the house, with its long colonnade; but planted in the space between were some bushes and low apple-trees, which prevented Theodore from seeing anything but the two steps which raised the portico from the ground, and the lower part of the pillars which composed it. As he looked on, however, he saw a female figure pass along the colonnade; and though he could not see the face, yet the sight of the small graceful foot that moved the full and floating robe was enough to make his heart beat high.

'I am Theodore, Ancinus,' he said. 'Let me pass, my good friend. These strangers can wait for me without. I am Theodore, son of Paulinus; I say let me pass.'

There was a cry of joy from within; for the tones of that voice had caught the ear of Ildica, and she had paused to listen—there was a cry of joy, a few steps, quick as those of the fawn bounding after its mother over the morning dew, and Ildica was in her lover's arms.

'At length! at length!' she exclaimed, as, twined in his arms and pressed to his heart, she raised those large dark lustrous eyes to his face, swimming with tears sweeter than the happiest smile that ever shone upon the human countenance. 'At length, at length, my Theodore, thou art come! Come after two long years and a half! Oh, how weary has felt my heart under the passing of that tedious time, and how busy has fancy been with all the dangers and with all the horrors in the storehouses, the wide dark storehouses of possibility! How I have tortured myself to think why my Theodore did not write; but thou art come, and the clouds are all dispelled.'

'Beloved, I did write,' replied Theodore. 'Twice have I written; but it was under such circumstances that I could hardly hope thou wouldst ever see the characters my hand had traced. Nor have I heard from thee, my Ildica; but I fancied no neglect, no forgetfulness, no change of affection.'

'I too wrote, beloved,' she answered; 'but I wrote only once, because no other occasion presented itself of sending letters to the country of the Huns. Forgetfulness! neglect! change of affection! Oh, Theodore! could anything in life change that, which I feel sure death itself can never alter? What have I thought of but thee since last we met? But let us to my mother; let her share our joy.'

'That joy will be greater, my beloved, when you hear all,' replied the youth; and, still circling her fair form with his arm, while her hand remained clasped in his, he accompanied her back into the house where Flavia sat, unknowing his arrival.

'Joy, dearest mother, joy!' cried Ildica: 'here is our Theodore returned.'

'Ay, and returned,' added Theodore, 'never to quit you again! Attila—though I saw that it gave him no slight pain—has freed me from the rest of the term which I had bound myself by promise to remain with him. He has but exacted that I shall never bear arms against his people, nor provoke them to strife with me; for he has a superstition that the first injury inflicted by any of them upon me, will be followed by his ruin or his death.'

'Happy superstition!' cried Flavia, embracing him: 'and so I trust our long sorrows are over, my dear son. We have needed thee much; but now that thou wilt not leave us more, my cares are at an end: and when I have seen thee and my Ildica united for ever, I willingly quit a world of which I have long been weary.'

'Quit us not, my mother!' replied Theodore, 'quit us not! but remain with us to witness our happiness and to share it! But oh, let that happiness be made complete as soon as may be. Let no time elapse ere Ildica becomes my own. Till I hold her to my heart, my own dear wife, I shall fear lest every hour that flies may bring some new misfortune to separate us again. Say, Ildica, say, when will you be mine?'

The blood rose in the beautiful girl's cheek, and neck, and brow, spreading through that pure and ivory skin like the blush of dawn upon the snowy heads of the mountains; and feeling how the crimson was mounting in her face, she hid it upon her lover's breast, replying, 'When my mother thinks fit.'

'To-morrow! oh, to-morrow, dear mother!' cried Theodore.

'Nay, nay,' said Flavia, with a smile, 'not quite so soon as that! Let it be the following day. What say you, Ildica? Is that too soon?'

'Speak, beloved! speak!' cried Theodore; but she still hid her eyes upon his breast, and yet the soft clasping of her hand upon his, told him that she gave no unwilling consent. Feeling that she was much agitated, he sought some other theme to release her mind from

its happy burden, till custom should render it lighter to bear.

'She consents, my mother!' he said, 'she consents! but where is Eudochia? She must come and share our joy. I wonder she has not yet heard of her brother's return.'

'She has gone to the capitol,' replied Ildica, raising her head: 'there is a splendid sight there to-day; and Ammian sent a messenger to say he had found a place for her where she could see it all.'

'Ammian!' exclaimed Theodore: 'I heard, as I came along, that he had gone out of the city towards Pincianus.'

'Oh no,' replied Flavia: 'he went to the capitol, and sent both a messenger and a litter for Eudochia, saying that he had found a place for her at the house of Julius Sabinus, otherwise she should not have gone.'

But Theodore was not satisfied. Though the words of the flower girl might be idle words, yet they remained upon memory, and a cloud came over him as of new sorrows approaching. At that moment they heard voices at the door, and one of them spreaking with the tones of a woman in loud entreaty. Theodore listened:—'I must see him, I must speak with him,' cried the voice: 'It is not to sell my flowers: it is on business of importance' to him himself, that I seek to see him. Only tell him I am here, and see whether he will not let me speak with him.'

'That is the voice of the flower girl,' cried Theodore, 'who told me that Ammian had gone out to Pincianus. Some evil has happened, I fear!'

'Again!' cried Ildica, 'again!' and she cast down her dark eyes towards the ground, with an expression of deep despondency, as if she asked of the dust from which we rise and to which we fall, 'What is this inscrutable fate, that dogs us through existence, never suffering us to know a moment's happiness, without pouring into the cup the bitter drop that turns it all to gall?'

Theodore had in the meantime advanced towards the gate, and was met midway by the flower girl with whom he had spoken, and who had now passed the gate-keeper, and was hurrying in.

'You told me you were her brother!' she cried, as she met him—'you told me you were her brother! If so, and if you would save her from Valentinian, fly to the palace, quick! They have borne her thither. I saw her carried to the inner court in a litter, and heard her cries and entreaties, when she discovered where they were taking her to. If you are her brother, hasten thither quickly with your Huns! You may save her yet; for almost all—guards, attendants, officers—have gone to the show. You may save her yet, perchance—or at least avenge her!'

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### THE TYRANT.

In a room in the imperial palace lighted from above, and far removed from any of the chambers usually inhabited by the emperors, upon a luxurious couch of down, covered with crimson, and strewed with the flowers of the hyacinth, whose sweet perfume, mingled with that of a thousand other flowers, gave the whole chamber an atmosphere of delicious but overpowering perfume, lay Valentinian, the weak, luxurious, vicious monarch of the West, clothed in a light and floating robe of silk, and with his odour-dropping hair bound effeminate with a fillet twined with flowers.

He seemed to listen eagerly for some sounds; and in a moment or two the trampling of feet, some sobbing cries, and a voice in the tone of expostulation, were heard. The next instant the door of the room—for it was one closed by a door furnished with locks and bolts—was thrown open, and a litter was borne in, and set down in the midst of the chamber.

The slaves of Valentinian, for—though not habited in the usual garb of the imperial household—they were but the ministers of his pleasure, instantly withdrew, and starting from the litter, a lovely girl, terror in her aspect, and her eyes dewed with tears, stood gazing wildly round the room, as if seeking some means of escape. She was yet in her early youth, and modesty and innocence were written in every line of her fair countenance. But neither modesty, nor innocence, nor youth, had any effect upon the corrupt and selfish man before her, who, as soon as the slaves were gone, advanced, and taking her hand, endeavoured to soothe her, pouring into her ear all the vile but honeyed words of a consummate corrupter.

Snatching her hand from his, and shrinking back from him into one corner of the room, Eudochia gazed upon him in silent terror, as she would have gazed upon some poisonous serpent suddenly crossing her path. But Valentinian still pursued, exclaiming, 'But listen to me, fair Eudochia. It is the emperor seeks your love. It is Valentinian who commands your obedience. The wealth and splendour of a world shall be poured out at your feet, the love of your sovereign shall encircle you with all earth's choicest gifts;' and he went on with words on which we will not dwell to wrong her innocent ear with evil persuasions.

For a time Eudochia gazed in silence, as if terror and horror had deprived her of the use of her intellect; but as Valentinian concluded, and was again approaching her, she suddenly seemed to recollect herself, and, with a quick start forward, cast herself at his feet.

'Hear me, oh emperor!' she cried, 'hear me, if there be one spark of noble feeling left in your bosom. If you be a monarch, if you be an emperor, if you be a man, hear me, and set me free! I cannot love you, I ought not to love you, but as a subject loves an emperor. You are already wedded; my heart is already given to another! Wrong not your empress, wrong not me, by seeking love that never can be yours. Let me go! oh, let me go! and show yourself really worthy of your high station. You cannot—surely you will not, be the first to violate the laws which you are bound to maintain. How would you punish another were he to treat me even as your slaves have done? Oh let me beseech, let me entreat, let me adjure you, by all you hold sacred, to set me free! Hear me, hear me! Oh, monarch, hear me!'

And with uplifted hands, and streaming eyes, she went on, urging him to justice and compassion; but even her terror and distress had charms for the base tyrant. He attempted to throw his arms around her; he kissed her fair brow as she knelt imploring at his feet. But at that act Eudochia felt all the spirit of her race rise up within her as she saw her prayers unheeded and her appeals to justice only provoking deeper insult. She sprang upon her feet, she freed herself from his arms, she snatched from his girdle, even in the struggle to cast him off, a small eastern dagger, which the weak tyrant wore. 'Stand back!' she cried; 'stand back? or, by the memory of my father, who died to save his country, I will drive this blade into thy heart, thou Tarquin!'

'Girl, you dare not!' cried Valentinian, drawing back; 'you dare not raise your hand against your emperor!'

'All girl as I am, I dare raise my hand against any tyrant on the earth,' replied Eudochia, 'let him clothe himself with whatsoever name he will. Come not near me, or you die! Tyrant, I am resolved! My honour is as dear to me as life to you! Let me go free, or Valentinian shall this day cease to live and reign!'

'Well, well! thou shalt go!' said the emperor, in a softened tone; 'but I must call the slaves, to make them open the door from without. Promise me that thou wilt not strike me as I approach the door.'

'I will not,' replied Eudochia, 'so as you set me free.'

'You shall be free,' answered Valentinian, moving towards the door—'you shall be free.'

But when between Eudochia and the entrance of the room, within a single step of either, he suddenly turned, sprang upon her, wrenched the dagger from her grasp, and, casting it on the other side of the couch, exclaimed, 'Now, girl! now! what punishment shalt thou undergo for daring to hold a dagger to the breast of thine emperor?'

Eudochia gazed round in hopeless despair. But then came a sound of hasty steps and angry voices; and, with sudden hope rushing through her bosom, she uttered scream after scream, to attract the notice of any one who might be passing near. Valentinian seemed not to have heard, or not to heed, the sounds, for he pursued his evil course; but while he endeavoured to silence the unhappy object of his passions, the door of the chamber was shaken violently.

The bolts and locks resisted; but another and another blow came crashing upon the wood-work. Valentinian, with a cheek as pale as death, retreated towards the couch, and sought for the dagger, which was the only weapon he had worn. The next moment the door gave way, and the brother of Eudochia, followed by twenty or thirty of the armed Huns, rushed into the chamber. His sword was drawn, and bloody in his hand; and stretched across the long passage might be seen the corpse of one of the base instruments of the tyrant's vices, who had dared to resist the passage of the Roman, hastening to the deliverance of his sister.

Theodore caught her in his arms, and Eudochia wept upon his bosom. But such thoughts as had inspired the bosoms of his ancestors were in his heart at that moment, and he gave her little time to weep.

'Are you safe, my sister?' he cried, with his eyes still glaring on Valentinian. 'Are you pure? By the memory of our father, I adjure you! are you unpolluted?'

'I am, Theodore! I am!' she answered: 'thanks to God, and to you, I am!'

'Vile slave!' cried Valentinian, attempting to assume the air of empire; 'who are you? How dare you——'

But Theodore cut him short. 'Base, effeminate, soulless tyrant!' he answered, 'well may you thank God that I arrived in time to save you from the crime you sought to commit. Well may you thank God! for your cowardly and pitiful life had surely been ended here, had you succeeded in injuring her; and your soul had been sent to hell burdened with the sin it had just perpetrated.'

Valentinian trembled and turned pale, the coward blood forsaking his heated cheek at the stern aspect of the young Roman. He attempted, however, though in a weak and faltering voice, to call for his guards and his officers; but Theodore replied, with a look of withering scorn, 'You call in vain, tyrannical disgrace of Rome—you call in vain. The means that you have taken to insure that your crime should be effected in silence and secrecy, have left you as powerless as the lowest slave in your dominions. All the

better and the purer part of your court, sent forth to take part in the procession, have left you alone in this wing of the palace, with none but the slavish ministers of your pleasures near thee. They are in the hands of my followers, except yon rash fool, lying there in his blood, who attempted to stop a brother flying to his sister's rescue. Thou art in my power,' he added, 'to take or leave thy pitiful life as I will; and couldst thou but see how contemptible a thing thou hast made thyself, as thou standest there, quivering with fear and guilt before thine injured subject, shame would surely supply the place of virtue, and thou wouldst blush for the crimes that have degraded thee so low.'

'Traitor!' exclaimed Valentinian, with the blood rushing up into his face—'traitor, thou shalt rue this day!'

'Monarch, I shall not,' replied Theodore, 'were even your power as extended as it is weak and circumscribed; were the Romans found base enough to suffer a tyrant to oppress a citizen for defending a helpless girl, and that girl his sister, you dare not, no, you dare not openly raise a hand against my life. Know that in me you see one whom Attila, at whose very name you tremble, looks upon as his son. Letters are already in thy court announcing my coming, and bidding thee do me justice in all things; and thou darest as soon raise thy hand against me, as thou darest offer thy neck to the axe.'

'So,' cried the base monarch, glad like all weak minds convicted of crime to seek revenge in scorn, where they have no refuge in justice, and no power of retaliation—'so thou art one of those degenerate Romans who fight against their country in the ranks of the barbarians!'

'Monarch, thou liest,' answered Theodore, boldly. 'I have never fought against my country. My sword has never been drawn; my spear has never been pointed against a Roman breast. I have saved the life of Attila; I have saved the life of his son, but I have taken no part in his wars; and defy thee to show that I have ever been guilty of one act against my country. Little, too, would it become thee, oh emperor, to reproach any one for betraying his native land! Hast thou not given tribute to the barbarian? hast thou never sacrificed the innocent to the fury of the Huns? hast thou never encouraged the hordes of Scythia to invade the Roman territories? But I leave thee, oh monarch! My sister is safe; thy crimes are averted; and, as if clad in a panoply of iron, my innocence defies thy power, and scorns thy menaces. Come, Eudochia, come! The litter and the slaves which brought thee hither, as the object of a base monarch's passion, shall carry thee back as pure as when thou camest.'

Throwing his arm round her, but without sheathing the sword he carried in his right hand, lest any opposition should be made to his retreat, Theodore placed her in the litter; and, at a word to some of his followers, the slaves of Valentinian, who had borne her thither, were brought in, raised their fair burden from the ground, and obeyed at once the young Roman in bearing her away homeward. The dark Huns who had accompanied him surrounded them on every side, and Theodore himself, after casting one more look of mingled scorn and indignation upon the tyrant, from whom he had just snatched his prey, followed his sister from the palace, without obstruction, and almost without notice, so carefully had Valentinian removed from the precincts of those apartments every one who might witness or report, or interrupt the commission of the crime he had meditated.

While his own slaves had been compelled to bear Eudochia away, the weak monarch of the West had remained, with impotent fury burning in his bosom, and eyes glaring angrily upon that which he could not prevent. His features had worked, his hands had wrung each other, his colour had varied, under the influence of passion, like the complexion of a timid girl. He had more than once sought for the hilt of the dagger, too, as if he would fain have struck it into the heart of the bold youth, who taunted him so scornfully. But fear had restrained his violence; and when Eudochia was gone, he remained, for several minutes, motionless as a statue, gazing down upon the floor, without any perceptible movement, except a slight pressure of his hands together, and the sterner knitting of his angry brow. What were all the dark and the painful thoughts, the burning bitter shame, the lowered but still fierce and venomous pride, that now raged within, it matters not to inquire: suffice it, that so intense and potent were they, that they seemed to absorb his whole soul and mind; and there he remained, as we have said, for many minutes, without speech or movement. At length, however, the imprisoned tempest burst forth, and stamping violently upon the ground, he poured forth a torrent of curses and imprecations upon himself, upon Theodore, upon Eudochia, upon the whole world; and then, casting himself down upon that flower-strewed couch, he raved and gnashed his teeth in the agony of anger, degradation, and disappointment. After a time, starting up again, he leaned his brow for a moment or two upon his hand, as if in thought, and then called loudly for his attendants.

'Ho, without there!' he exclaimed: 'is nobody near? Is everybody fled? Are ye all fools, or cowards, or traitors? Does nobody answer to the voice of the emperor?'

As his voice ran along the passages of the building, with slow and fearful steps, a single eunuch crept out from some corner in which he had concealed himself; and stepping with evident terror over the body of the fallen slave, who had been slain in attempting to prevent the entrance of Theodore, he approached the door at which the monarch stood, and cast himself at his feet.

'Pitiful, cowardly wretch!' exclaimed Valentinian, 'why didst thou abandon thy lord, to be insulted by that frantic boy; or if thou hadst not power to resist him and his barbarians, why didst thou not fly, by the opposite passage, to the chief apartments, and call up the chamberlain and his guards?'

'I had but time to hide myself in the bath, from which there is no outlet,' replied the eunuch. 'My comrade was smitten to the ground in a moment; and I should have shared the same fate, without serving thee, oh great monarch! if I had not darted away, where first I could find refuge!'

'Well, get thee gone quick,' replied the emperor. 'Call up hither, instantly, the prefect of the palace, and also the chamberlain. Lose not a moment.'

The eunuch hastened to obey; and after having been absent some time, which Valentinian passed sitting on the edge of the couch in deep and angry thought, he returned with several inferior domestics, but neither of the two high officers he had been sent to seek.

'Where is the prefect, where the chamberlain?' exclaimed Valentinian, with his eyes flashing and his brows knit into a more bitter frown than ever. 'Do all my servants neglect and abandon me?'

'Both the prefect, and the guardian of the secret chamber,' replied the slave, 'as well as the count of the domestics, and all the other high officers of the palace, are gone, by your own imperial order, to grace the procession round the capitol.'

Valentinian again stamped with rage; but, after a few moments' consideration, he sent away the greater part of the attendants, and calling to him one in whom he seemed to have more confidence than the rest, he demanded, 'Dost thou remember, Elius, whither we were told that wild youth, Ammian Flavius, had gone this morning?'

'I know well, oh emperor,' replied the domestic—'I know well; for the men who lured him thither were sent by myself, to get him out of the way. The inhabitants of two of the villages at the foot of Pincianus hold to-day, we hear, a secret sacrifice to Jupiter; and this wild youth, whom anything that is strange or extravagant will mislead, was easily induced to go out to witness it, notwithstanding the penalties of death pronounced against all present.'

'Hark!' said Valentinian; 'as soon as the procession is over, send out to Pincianus men enough to drown all these incorrigible pagans in their own blood. Let them slay all they find. Jupiter shall have victims enough; but on no account let them touch this Ammian. Take especial care to save him. Let him be brought into the city guarded. He shall be impaled alive! We will put down these sacrifices—but hark thee again, there is more to be done!—Get thee gone, eunuch. Thou art a coward, and not fit to listen to the deeds of brave men.—Elius, a youth has been here, and snatched the girl from my hands;—her brother, it would seem—that Theodore whom we have heard of. He has borne her back to the Aventine. He has insulted me, the emperor. He has slain one of the slaves, and he must die, Elius. But on account of this Attila, it must be no public act.—He must die, Elius! but it must be by some chance accident, or in some casual strife. He must die, Elius, he must die! Let not the sun rise upon him again: I leave it to thee, my faithful servant—I leave it to thee to do justice upon the traitor. There is a fair estate, not far from Arica. Thou knowest it well—rich in wine, in oil, and corn; it is thine, if this Theodore be dead ere to-morrow morning. See to it!'

'I will find means,' replied Elius, calmly.

Valentinian gazed in his face; and finding there a look of assurance which had never failed him, he felt as satisfied as if the deed were done, and with a slow step he sought the other part of the palace.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### THE PAGAN SACRIFICE.

THERE is even now—when the sweeping hand of ages has levelled with the earth so many of the things which in the times we speak of were in their splendour—there is even now at the foot of Pincianus a deep shady grove of tall trees, amidst the stems of which the treacherous sunshine of the Roman spring pours its mellow light with a peculiar charm. This, however, is but a small vestige of the magnificent wood that at one period covered the side of the hill, and swept over the undulating country at its base, a wood consisting solely of high upright trees, springing from a green and luxuriant turf, which their own shadow kept cool and verdant. A bright stream, long since licked up by the burning sun, then meandered round the foot of the hill full of delicious water, brawling sportively with the stones which formed its bed; and by the side thereof, every here and there an open space appeared, as if left by the taste of some skilful planter, either for wanderers through that enchanted scene to pause upon and gaze on the cool

wave, or for the gay and happy to meet in and prolong the hours with feast and revelry.

At either end of the wood, nearly a mile apart from each other, the one being situated half way up the slope, the other at its base, were two villages, which, though not remote from Rome, had, from various accidental circumstances, maintained in all ages much less communication than might have been expected with the great city, and which preserved with peculiar tenacity those old manners and customs which the secluded and the rustic adhere to with such fond affection. In vain had the customs of the city changed—the villagers of Pincianus changed not with Rome. In vain had empire succeeded republic, and effeminacy and luxury flowed in with demoralising power—the villagers retained their old simplicity, and when they carried their produce to the town but shrugged their shoulders at the strange and women-like men that they beheld. In vain even had the emperors put down by severe laws the poetical religion of their forefathers, and established a purer faith in its place—the villagers still loved their old deities and served their old gods. Even more, they resisted the words of truth, when the ministers of truth visited them in person; and driving forth from amongst them the preachers of the gospel, they returned to their old rites with persevering zeal.

Severe and more severe measures had been employed to put down paganism. Temples had been changed into churches; altars had been overthrown; the blood of the priest had been mingled with the blood of the victim, and the lives of the worshippers had been taken in the very act of sacrifice: but still the villagers adhered to their old faith, and through nearly a hundred years of persecution and suffering had retained, either openly or secretly, their reverence for the things their fathers had revered before them.

A season of comparative tranquillity had succeeded; and though the persecution of the idolaters had been cruel and virulent during the first years of the reigns of Theodosius and Valentinian, yet for the last lustre this rigour had been relaxed; and though still obliged to conceal, as far as possible, the rites and ceremonies which they practised, those who persevered in heathenism had suffered no very severe inflictions.

It was in one of those open spots, by the side of the stream which we have already described, that on a bright May day were assembled a multitude of people, clothed in white garments, and met together, apparently, for the purpose of offering sacrifice. The turf, out of which no tree grew, covered a space of nearly a hundred yards in diameter; but over a great part thereof hung the wide-spreading branches of the large oaks around, giving shade to the sylvan amphitheatre thus formed on the banks of the little river. The waters flowed on clear and sparkling; the murmurs of a distant fall filled the air with music; bright sunshine was pouring over all the scene and dancing through the leaves upon the turf below; flowers crowned the heads of all the assembly, and gemmed the verdant carpet on which they trod. Everything was smiling and beautiful; and, if the mind could be divested of the remembrance of the dark and sinful object for which the idolaters met, the whole scene had in it something so graceful, so poetical, so exciting, that one might well gaze with raised enthusiasm, even if one took no part in the rite which was about to be performed.

With such feelings stood Ammian Flavius, a little apart from the rest, leaning against one of the trees, at a little distance from which two servants held his horse. Four years had now passed since the period at which the reader first beheld him; and while Theodore had expanded into a handsome and powerful man, Ammian, from the wild and beautiful boy, which we at first portrayed, had grown up into a tall, graceful, manly youth. His fine features, his noble air, and his symmetrical form, might well attract attention; and many were the eyes that turned upon him, amongst those who met to offer on that day a sacrifice to their false deity. They gazed, however, without any mingling of apprehension; for it was not uncommon for some of the wild youths of the great city to steal out in secret to witness those rites to which their concealment gave an additional charm.

The day had waned considerably, and the sun was approaching the west. The flamen of Jupiter, as he called himself, though the office had been long abolished, stood in his purple robe beside a small altar raised in the midst, and strewed with flowers, and a number of gay laughing boys led along, with sportive glee, a milk-white bull, its neck wreathed with garlands, and its broad brow crowned with flowers. Long nurtured for the purpose of the sacrifice, and rendered familiar with the hands of men, which had never yet been raised against it with violence, the noble beast, unconscious of its coming fate, walked calmly in the midst, suffering itself to be led up to the altar with an untightened rope. Beside the priest stood the cultrarius, leaning on his axe, and all pressed near to witness the ceremony of immolation.

The invocation and the prayer had been pronounced; and the cultrarius, turning to the priest, demanded in the accustomed form, 'Shall I do it?'

'Do it!' replied the priest, and swinging

the axe above his head, the stout peasant who performed that office laid the monarch of the herd, at a single blow, dead at the foot of the altar. The priest was hastening to apply the knife, when Ammian, hurrying forward, exclaimed, 'I hear coming horses, my friends, be upon your guard.'

All looked up and listened, and some thought that they also heard the sounds; but if it was so, those sounds ceased almost instantly, and the ceremony proceeded, while Ammian, with his colour slightly raised at the mistake he appeared to have made, retired again to the tree by which he had formerly stood, and continued to gaze upon the proceedings of the rest.

Before many minutes were over, however, a troop of Roman horsemen appeared on the other side of the stream; dashed through its shallow waters; and with their spears and swords, carried slaughter and confusion amongst the heathen worshippers. The priest was at once struck down; but the cultrarius defended himself with his axe for some time, and was at length slain by a javelin thrown from some distance. Resistance was also made by several others who had arms concealed upon their persons; and if the whole body had taken the same precaution, they might in all probability have resisted successfully the force sent against them, which did not consist of more than fifty or sixty men.

In the midst of the strife, five of the soldiers, leaving the others to pursue their attack upon the heathen, cut straight across, and surrounded Ammian; who, seeing that no words were spoken, but death inflicted indiscriminately upon every one, drew his sword, and determined to sell his life dearly. He was overpowered, however, before he could offer any effectual resistance, by one of the Romans springing from behind the tree, and clinging to his right arm. In another moment he found himself tied with cords, and dragged away into the midst of the confusion, where the soldiers were still, with merciless activity, slaughtering the unhappy wretches, whom they had detected in celebrating the forbidden rites.

Without preserving any order themselves, the troopers pursued wherever they saw a victim to strike; and the villagers, taking advantage of the trees, in many instances kept their cruel persecutors at bay for some time; while the shifting of the horses here and there; the rushing of the crowd of victims, now driven into a body together, now scattering wide to avoid their pursuers; the efforts of resistance; the gestures of supplication; the shrieks of the women and children; the groans of the dying, formed altogether a scene of agony and horror such as the eyes of Ammian had never before beheld.

In the midst of it all, however, he suddenly perceived a horseman clothed in the wild arms of the barbarians mingling with the Roman soldiers. Another and another appeared as if by magic, urging their swift horses through the trees on all sides. The Romans, accustomed to see the barbarians in the emperor's service, seemed to look upon all, except the villagers, as their friends, and took no notice of those who appeared amongst them, till the number became formidable—equalled—surpassed their own; and then he who appeared to be the commander of the imperial troop suddenly drew up his horse and gazed upon the strangers.

'The barbarian is striking a Roman,' he exclaimed. 'What is the meaning of this? Fellow, art thou mad?'

The only answer which he received from the man to whom he shouted forth those hurried questions, was a javelin cast by an unerring hand, which smote him between the eyes, and cast him lifeless beneath the horse's feet.

All was now confusion tenfold confused. The well-armed barbarians, hand to hand, and man to man, drove back the Roman soldiers. The villagers, mad with rage against their oppressors, and inspired with hope by the unexpected aid they had received, became in turn the assailants, and following the Huns amongst their retreating adversaries, armed with the knives which they bore upon their own persons, or the swords which they caught up from the dead or dying, cut the sinews of the Roman horses, or gave the stroke of death to any one who fell wounded from his charger.

For a short time the imperial troops resisted: but they were soon driven across the stream into the open country. Ammian, whom they had placed on his horse, was led along with them, his arms tied as they were behind him, and unable to resist. But at length the rout of the Romans became complete, and they fled precipitately towards the city; while a small body of the Huns, urging their horses into double speed, dashed with a furious charge into the midst of the fugitives; reached the point where Ammian was borne along, slew the man who led his horse, and seizing his bridle-rein, hurried him away in the opposite direction, leaving the Romans to pursue their flight without farther interruption.

So rapidly did the barbarians urge their horses on, that Ammian had neither time nor breath to ask any questions. Only once they paused, as, pursuing their course at full speed, they took their way towards the ancient Umbria; and that was when they perceived that the adverse force, recovered from its terror, had detached a small body to watch their motions. Then, wheeling so suddenly

upon it, that retreat was impossible, they left not one of its number to bear back the tidings which it had been sent to obtain. Soon after, the sun set, and with a short twilight night came on. The star of evening, however, shone fair over the whole world, and light sufficient lingered in the skies to show a small lake spreading out across their path. At the spot where the road, taking a direction on either side of the lake, divided into two, stood a barbarian dressed and armed like the rest, and apparently waiting for them. A few eager and quick words were spoken in a tongue which Ammian did not understand; but he guessed by seeing the man point down to one side of the lake with his spear, and by various other gesticulations used on both sides, that he was directing the Huns to some body of their comrades; and he ventured to ask whither they were about to carry him.

'Fear not,' answered the man who led his horse, in very good Latin, while another took advantage of the pause to cut the cords that bound his hands—'fear not, you are with friends, and you are saved from death: we bear you to a place of safety, where you will hear more.'

Thus saying, he took the road to which the other man had pointed, and galloped on at the same quick pace as before. The moon was now rising over the neighbouring hills; and at the distance of about a mile they came to a number of tents, pitched in a meadow, by the bank of the lake. Several large flat boats were gathered together along the shore, and eight or nine armed men were watching on the verge of the lake; while round two or three fires, lighted at a short distance from the tents, were seen a multitude of barbarians revelling as usual over their evening meal.

The sound of the coming horses had no effect upon the Huns; but seemed to call the attention of the persons, whosoever they were, within the tents; for the hangings of two of them were pushed back, as Ammian and his conductors approached, and several people in the garb of Romans came forth. By the moonlight the youth could not distinguish their features, but there was more than one woman of the party; and as he sprang from his horse with feelings of joy, mingled with doubt, he was clasped to the bosom of his mother, Flavia, and then pressed in the arms of Theodore. Eudochia, Ildica, too, were there; and in a few brief words he related to them all that had happened to him. At length, shading his eyes from the light, he was led into the tent, and found the whole of Flavia's household assembled as it had quitted Dalmatia, with the exception of those whom the stern monarch of the grave had taken as his allotted tribute during four years of wandering

'What is all this? how is all this?' exclaimed the youth, gazing round: 'are we about once more to try our fortunes on the wide world?'

'Even so, Ammian,' answered Theodore: 'circumstances compel us to it, even when we fancied we were united once more, to dwell in peace together for the rest of our days.'

'Well, I care not,' cried Ammian: 'one land is the same to me as another; and wherever liberty is, we may find or found a Rome for ourselves. But hearken, Theodore! Listen to me, my dear brother! In all our past wanderings some one of us has been separated from those who were as dear to his heart as a part of itself. There wants some magic link between us to bind us all together; so that wherever we go we may, as slaves to our affections, be chained inseparably to one another. I have a bond to propose, Theodore, which, though it be formed of flowers, will yet prove as strong as adamant. You are to be united to my sister by the dearest ties; why should I not be united to yours by the same. Thus shall we become all, indeed, one family. What say you, my beloved Eudochia?—But you have said already, dear one,' he added, casting his arms around her, 'and it is needless to ask you. Theodore, Eudochia is mine—my promised bride! What say you, my brother?'

'Nothing in opposition, Ammian,' answered Theodore with a smile; 'nothing, but that you are very young, and somewhat wild, my brother.'

'Out upon such buts!' cried Ammian, laughing. 'I am young; but people would laugh at me more if I married when I was old. Youth is the time of love, and Cupid should surely be the only god that leads us to his brother. As to my wildness, I own it has been so; but it is past. To-day, for the first time, I felt it, and regretted it, and whatsoever I regret the possession of, I cast away from that minute. When the imperial soldiers burst upon my poor friends with their white bull, and seized upon me myself, slaying all around me, I thought of Eudochia, Theodore; I felt I had done wrong; I regretted my wild thoughtlessness; and resolved, if heaven spared me, never more so to offend again. I thought of Eudochia, Theodore: that thought cured me of my wildness, and will be my safeguard against the same disease again.'

'Well may it be so, my son,' replied Flavia; 'and when you know all that has befallen to this dear girl, since you left us this morning, you will still more deeply feel the evil of such heedlessness, you will guard your bosom still more strongly against its recurrence.'

'What has happened?' cried Ammian, his lustrous eyes flashing with eagerness—'What has happened?—Valentinian?—Ah, I know it

all! I saw him gaze, and sigh, and pass us ten times on the course the other day.—What has happened, my mother? Tell me! tell me!'

'I will,' answered Flavia; but Eudochia clung to her, exclaiming, 'Not now! not now, my mother! Oh, not now! Oh, then I will go away!' and hiding her blushing face upon Ildica's bosom, she hurried away with her into another tent.

All was then told to Ammian of Eudochia's danger and her rescue, and deep and sad seemed to grow his feelings as he listened. 'Fool that I was to leave her! Fool that I was to suffer myself to be seduced to witness that idiot sacrifice! for seduced thereunto I was, doubtless, by the agents of that imperial villain. Why did you not slay him, Theodore? I would have slain him where he stood.'

'And so would I,' replied Theodore, 'if he had committed the crime he intended. He should have died that moment had my own death followed the next; but Eudochia was saved; and I had still hopes of being able to remain in Rome. When I returned to the Aventine, however, I heard enough to make me resolve on flying. I found, too, that the Huns, who had accompanied me from Dacia, bore the commands of Attila to all their fellow-countrymen, in the service of Valentinian, to return instantly to their native land. I had nearly a hundred with me, several thousands more are at Rome and Ravenna; and I found that I could retreat from the wrath of the tyrant without his power being sufficient to prevent me. As we came hither, we saw a small body of horse go out from the gates towards Pincianus, where we had heard you were; and, fearing some danger, instead of merely sending a messenger to bid you join us, I sent a sufficient body of my followers to defend you in case of need. Their leader, who has been faithful to me for four long years, pledged his own life to bring you to me in safety; and here at length you are, though I hear with pain that Roman blood has been shed. Doubtless we shall be pursued; but every hour fresh parties of the Huns are coming hither to accompany us, and ere to-morrow morning we shall be too strong for Valentinian to effect aught against us. However, heaven forbid that the time should come when I may have to draw the sword against my fellow-countrymen, even in my own defence; and to avoid it we will cross the lake an hour before daylight to-morrow morning, then on through the mountains, to rejoin Attila, who has ever befriended me, and will, I doubt not, befriend me still.'

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### THE UNEXPECTED MEETING.

In a mountain pass, a little to the westward of the spot where now stands the small town of Bassano, amongst the first shoots of the Rhætian Alps, travelled onward the family of wanderers, whose various course we have traced from the beginning of this tale, as compelled by circumstances, and dogged by misfortune, they were driven from land to land.

They were no longer, however, alone and undefended amidst all the strife and danger of those perilous times: for the small body of Huns which had guarded Theodore in his journey to the imperial city had formed a nucleus, round which the Hunnish auxiliaries in the neighbourhood of Rome had gathered, as he re-trod his steps towards Pannonia; and a little army of barbarians now accompanied him on the way. Those who had been attached to him from his first arrival in the Hunnish territory, had not failed to magnify his deeds and reputation to every detached troop who joined them. The favour in which he stood with Attila was told and commented on; and his power and influence, as well as his courage, skill, and conduct, were so highly represented, that each party tacitly submitted to his authority; and in all great things, such as the direction and general regulation of their march, suffered the young Roman to retain the command of the whole force, as well as of his own particular followers.

He was thus enabled to save the country, through which he passed, from pillage; and though two or three times reports reached him of bodies of the imperial troops following his path, and even rumours of Ætius having returned, and being on his march across the fertile plains of Lombardy with a powerful army, met his ear, he was happily enabled to reach the foot of the Alps, without having recourse to one act of violence against any Roman citizen whatsoever.

The spot where they now halted for the day was by the banks of one of those small lakes, whereof so many fertilise and beautify the lower passes of the Alps. On every side around rose up the mighty mountains; and over their wooded sides, the clear masses of light and shade flew swift as the soft large clouds were borne by the quick wind through the lustrous summer's sky. It was evening time; and in all the thickets round about the nightingales—sweet untaught choristers, in whose tuneful art no time nor cultivation can improve a tone, or sweeten a single note—were chanting their thrilling anthem to the God of nature. In the clear mirror of the lake, deep down appeared the inverted moun-

tains, with the softened sky beyond, and every quick change of light and shade.

It was a lovely scene; and though the hearts of Theodore and Ildica had now become sadly learned in the lessons of frequent disappointment, yet that spot recalled their sweet refuge on the other side of those dark Alps, where, amidst the friendly Alani, they had enjoyed some brief, but never to be forgotten, hours of unalloyed delight. It recalled that place of refuge, and the hopes which they there had felt; and though those hopes had again been disappointed, they blossomed anew, different, yet the same; changed a little in form and arrangement, but not less beautiful, not less sweet—flowers of another spring, but of the same kind, from the same stem, from the same earth.

They had pitched their tents in a situation, which recalled their former resting-place the more strongly, as it was upon a projecting point, a short way up the hill. Below them lay the encampment of their Hunnish followers, and around them the domestic servants of their house; and as they sat there, and wisely encouraged once more the happy feelings that were willing to return, Theodore urged that, as they were now once more in safety, Ildica might give him her hand, wherever they could meet with a minister of religion to sanctify their union. Ildica said not one word against it; and as, with a slight blush, and downcast eye, she gave no unwilling consent, Theodore thought her far more lovely than ever, although a shade of melancholy, gathered from frequent disappointment, anxiety, and grief, hung over her, as if it had been a veil, seldom, if ever, raised entirely, even in her happiest moments. That shade of melancholy also was somewhat darker now, inasmuch as her fair and beloved mother had shown signs of failing strength, under the long and weary journey which they had just been compelled to take. Theodore hoped that the day's repose which they were now enjoying in that calm scene might sufficiently restore Flavia to proceed with comfort; but Ildica clearly saw that her mother could bear no great fatigue; and from some casual words which had fallen from her parent's lips she had gathered, that it was her intention, as soon as the double union of her children with those of Paulinus had taken place, to retire for ever from the busy world, and pass her remaining days in one of those places of seclusion, which were at that time to be found in almost every part of the world. Ildica could not contemplate such a separation without pain; and though she shrunk not from her union with one whom she loved so deeply and intensely, yet she feared the parting with her mother, whom she had loved so long, and who loved her so tenderly.

Upon the brow of the promontory, Theodore and Ildica sat and gazed, and thought over the future, with sweet hopes and dark apprehensions crossing the expanse of thought, like the sunshine and the shade that flitted across the mountains before their eyes; and ever and anon they spoke over many things, with that unreserved confidence which is one of the sweetest drops in the ambrosial cup of love. Since they had last met, the tone of Ildica's mind had undergone some alteration. It had become deeper, more intense, more enthusiastic. In everything that engaged her—though there might be fewer things that did so—she took a profounder interest; and, whether it was her love for Theodore, her devotion to the bright faith in which she had been reared, her love for her mother, or any other thing in which her heart was concerned, there was a depth, a strength, an energetic eagerness in her whole feelings, which raised and ennobled her still more than ever in the eyes of her lover.

They sat and gazed. Wide spread over the valley below, and up the sides of the hill, even higher than themselves, might be seen various parties of the Huns, seeking forage for their horses, or food for themselves; and as the eye of Theodore was turned towards the entrance of the valley, where mountain falling over mountain seemed to close up the pass, he thought he saw a considerable degree of bustle and movement, in a body of about thirty or forty of the barbarians, whom he had marked winding down in that direction, by the banks of a small stream that entered the lake hard by. It subsided in a few minutes, however, and he took no farther notice, pursuing his conversation with Ildica, and looking on well pleased, while the Huns, in a spot void of other inhabitants, engaged themselves in a thousand peaceful occupations, as if they never sought for strife, or dipped their hands in blood.

Half an hour more had elapsed, or perhaps scarcely so much, and Theodore and Ildica were deep in the business of their own hearts, when suddenly a step sounded amongst the tents behind them, which—wherefore he knew not—made Theodore start, and turn round.

What was his astonishment, when, not a spear's length from him, he beheld Attila himself,* who, advancing with a slow step, looked

* The march of the armies of Attila in all her expeditions is very doubtfully displayed by ancient historians: but that in his advance into Italy he took and sacked the city of Augusta Vindelicorum, or Augsburg, is clear, previous to the capture of Aquileia, and therefore that he must have traversed some part of the Julian or Rhætian Alps, is equally certain. Any one who casts his eye upon the map will see, that his direct way into Italy, from Vindelicia, was by the passes of the Tyrol; and any one

upon the young Roman with a smile as distinct as ever crossed his stern, fixed countenance. The next moment, however, the glance of the barbarian monarch turned upon Ildica ; and the light of suddenly-excited admiration shone forth from his eyes. It was but momentary, however, and, addressing himself kindly to Theodore, he said, 'So, my son, thou hast left the bright court of Valentinian to come back to the barbarian. Thou art welcome ; for I may chance to have much need of thee : and thou shalt find, as thou hast found, higher honours, and a kinder monarch, in the land of the stranger than in thine own.'

Thus saying, he sat himself familiarly down upon the bank between Theodore and Ildica. She, however, rose, and was about to retire into the tent ; but he stopped her, gently saying, 'Do not depart ! Fear me not, fair one ; I will not injure thee. Who is this, my son ?' he continued, addressing Theodore—'Is this thy sister ?'

'Not so, oh king !' answered Theodore, who had always found it best to speak to Attila the straightforward truth, without the slightest disguise or concealment. 'Not so : she is my promised bride, and in a few days will be my wife.'

''Tis well !' said Attila ; 'tis well ! She is beautiful, and doubtless good. I will witness thy nuptials, and give thee the bridal present ; for I hear, from those whom I met but now at the end of the valley, that thou needest a protector, and one shalt thou find in Attila.'

Ildica still stood lingering, as if anxious to retire ; and the monarch of the Huns, perceiving her embarrassment, added suddenly, 'Well, hie thee in, then, fair one : thou fearest the barbarian king ; but Attila can be gentle to those he loves. I will pass this day with thee, my son ; and this timid girl shall see, that he, whom she has been taught to look upon as a cruel tyrant, can sit him down as peacefully to a calm and humble board as the most polished and effeminate Roman of them all can cast himself on his couch to gorge upon a thousand dishes. Hie thee in, fair one : I will speak with thy lover alone.'

Ildica obeyed ; and after she was gone, Attila remained for several moments in a deep fit of thought. Then, raising his head, he turned to some of his attendants, who stood near, saying, 'Get ye gone, and bring up hither the roe-deer that the men took in the forest as we came along, with what fish ye can find in the stream. Here will I take my evening meal. Get ye gone, all of you.'

The attendants departed as they were bid ; and Attila again fell into a deep fit of thought, after which he turned to Theodore, and said, abruptly, 'I am glad thou hast come back. This Valentinian, this woman-emperor, is insolent, and must be punished ; and I am well pleased that thou dwellest not amongst those who will soon feel the sword of Attila. Knowest thou what has happened in the East ?'

'I heard as I went to Rome,' said Theodore, 'that the base murderer of my father, Theodosius, is no more ; but I have heard no farther tidings, and only guess that the empire has fallen to his sister, Pulcheria.'

'And that Pulcheria has taken unto herself a husband,' added Attila, 'on whom she has conferred the rule of the land. We hear that he is a brave man and a wise man. If he be wise, he will pay our tribute, or he will have to do with braver than himself.'

'Doubtless he will pay it,' replied Theodore, with a sigh. 'Hast thou sent to demand it, oh mighty king ?'

'I have,' answered Attila. 'For if it be not paid, after conquering Rome, I march against Constantinople. But, doubtless, he will pay it.'

'Is this new monarch's name known ?' demanded Theodore : 'I know most of those who were in favour at the court of the East ; but I know none on whom Pulcheria was likely to shower such gifts.'

'His rise has been sudden,' answered Attila. 'He had gained some renown as a soldier, and was a military tribune ; but enjoyed no great favour with the empty Theodosius : his name is Marcian.'

'Marcian !' exclaimed Theodore, with joy sparkling from his eyes : 'he was the dearest friend of my dead father, and since my father's death has been equally the dear and considerate friend of his friend's children. He is, indeed, great as a warrior—noble and wise as a man.'

Attila's brow grew dark, as if he loved not to hear such praises of the Eastern emperor.

'Think you,' he demanded harshly, 'that he will pay the tribute ? Think you, that he will yield obedience to our commands ?'

'I think,' replied Theodore, firmly, 'that he will yield to no demand urged in a haughty tore. Were I the greatest monarch on all the earth, I would rather have Marcian for my friend than for my enemy.'

'Ha !' cried Attila : 'he had better set his naked foot upon an asp than cross my path of victory. Ha ! what sayest thou ? will he dare to raise himself up against Attila ?'

'Perchance not, oh great king,' replied Theodore—'perchance not ; but it will de-

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who is acquainted with the nature of the country will, if he take into consideration that the army of Attila consisted entirely of cavalry, conclude, that the Brenner was the pass by which he conducted his myriads towards the plains of Lombardy.

pend upon Attila's demeanour towards him. Marcian is no Theodosius. Bred in arms from his youth upward, his birth-place was the battle-field; the camp his cradle; war and strife the sports of his youth; command the employment of his manhood. He is no silken reposer on soft couches, but a hardy soldier, for whom the palace will scarcely afford a pillow hard enough to prop his head. If Attila entreat him fairly, Marcian is one to reverence and to love the high qualities of that mighty monarch, and to grant him the friendship that one great man is fond to feel towards another; but if Attila declares himself the enemy, and seeks to become the master of the emperor, Marcian will draw the sword, and it will never be sheathed till one or the other lies in the cold grave. Oh Attila, you have never yet met with Marcian. Better, oh king, better far, to have him for your friend than for your enemy!'

Attila rolled his dark eyes fiercely as Theodore spoke; but for some minutes he answered not, and then, gradually resuming his stern calmness, he said, 'We shall see! We shall see! I seek not to wrong him—but we shall see! So this Marcian was your father's friend; and you know and love him yourself?'

'I do, oh Attila!' answered Theodore, 'and I have cause. After my father's death, Marcian sought out, protected, befriended me; enabled me and mine to pursue our flight in safety, and risked even the emperor's wrath, in order to favour our escape. I love him dearly, and he, for my father's sake, loves me. He is one of those men who, like thyself, oh king, are hard and firm, as some fine gem, which nothing but a gem will cut; but upon which, the lines once engraved no power will afterwards remove; and there they last, as clear and definite under the wearing power of time as if nothing but a soft stream passed over them. My father's love will never be forgot.'

'The tribune might remember,' said Attila, 'what the emperor may forget.'

'Not so, oh king!' answered Theodore: 'Marcian changes not. The same was he as a common soldier in the Roman ranks, as when a tribune, possessed of vast power. When in the lowest military station in the state, his conduct, his manners, his mind, showed him worthy of the highest; and when midway to power and dignity, unlike the changeful herd of ordinary men, authority sat as lightly on him as obedience. What he was as a soldier he was as a tribune, and will be as an emperor. Though not born in that high station, he was born for it; and not only his virtues and his talents, but many another more marvellous indication showed that one day God would place in his hand the destinies of the Roman people.'

'Indeed!' cried Attila, fixing his eyes upon the young Roman with a greater expression of surprise than he ever manifested on any ordinary occasion. 'Indeed! What were these portents?'

'They have been many, as I have heard,' replied Theodore. 'Escapes from danger almost miraculous; and twice, when sleeping in the open field, an eagle has been seen to hover over his head, and shade him from the scorching sun. These I report but on hearsay. Once, however, I can speak myself to an event of the same kind. After a great earthquake, some four years ago, he was coming from Salona to Aspalathos, and was met by us upon the road. He pitched his tent where we encountered him; and while we were still with him, an eagle, which had followed his troop all day, came down and rested on the tent pole.'

Attila started up, and seemed troubled. 'This is very strange,' he said: 'you were present yourself?'

'I was,' answered Theodore. 'There is no more doubt of it than that I stand here.'

'An eagle!' exclaimed the monarch: 'So wild and fierce a bird to alight and rest amidst a troop of men!'

'It is strange, indeed, oh king!' said Theodore; 'most strange, but no less true; and its very strangeness made all men, but himself, believe that it was an indication of some future greatness.'

Attila replied not, but remained several minutes with his eyes bent upon the ground; and then, starting somewhat abruptly, he exclaimed, 'Let us into thy tents, my son; I will eat with thee, and drink with thee, this night; and then leave thee till to-morrow, when thou shalt go back with me to Tridentum. There my own ambassadors, and those of Marcian, come to seek me; and as I will not ask thee to bear arms against thy country, instead of taking thee with me to sweep away Valentinian and tread upon Rome, I will send thee to this noble monarch of the East. Thou mayest do more with him, perchance, than a mere stranger.'

The heart of Theodore beat high, for he saw before him a prospect of better things, and happier days. The hope of a journey to Constantinople, where he might place Ildica, and all who were dear to him, under the generous protection of Marcian, was in no slight degree joyful, and he at length beheld, or imagined that he beheld, a certain and permanent refuge for the future, and a happy termination of all his wanderings. Gladly then did he express his willingness to accept the office which Attila proposed to confer upon him; and though there was something dark, and even gloomy, in the countenance of the king, as he followed the young Roman into his tent,

yet the eyes of Theodore were lighted up with joy and satisfaction, which spread itself to all around.

He found no opportunity of relating what had happened, or of explaining the hopes and prospects which had cheered his breast, yet Ildica saw sufficient in the glad smile of Theodore's lip to feel sure that some new source of joy had been opened out for them all. At heart, indeed, she was anxious for her mother, who, ill at ease, and reposing in another tent, entered not that in which the king partook of the evening meal with her children; but still the demeanour of the monarch himself, and the satisfaction which she saw upon the countenance of Theodore, banished the darker apprehensions which had mingled with her former hopes.

The dark monarch of the Huns, retaining all his simple habits, drinking from the cup of horn, and served on no richer materials than wood, unbent in the tent of the young Roman, as far as his own stern nature would suffer him to do, from the rigid gravity of his usual demeanour. He spoke kindly and gently to Theodore and the rest, whom he made sit around him, and from time to time his lip almost relaxed into a smile, at the wild light spirit of Ammian, which would have way, notwithstanding the overawing presence of that mighty and terrible man. On Eudochia he gazed as on a beautiful child; and though he but seldom turned his eyes towards Ildica, yet when he did so, there was in them an expression which showed that her exquisite beauty, however graceful and refined, was appreciated by the barbarian monarch, as much as it could have been by the most delicate sculptor of ancient Greece. Theodore, however, felt no alarm; and as soon as Attila had mounted his horse, and departed for his own camp, which was at the distance of but a few miles, the young Roman hastened to communicate to Ildica and her mother his hopes and wishes. He told them the prospect of his being sent on a mission to Marcian; and he besought her he loved to give him her hand, and to go with him as his bride to the city of Constantine. Flavia's countenance lighted up with joy at the thought, and Ildica said not nay. Again the time of their union was named, with but an intervening day, and Theodore lay down to rest with as much happiness as hope can pour into the human breast.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### THE PURPOSE OF INJUSTICE.

It was in a vast hall in the ancient city of Tridentum, hanging over the Adige, where, rushing through the mighty rocks of the Rhætian Alps, that river pours on to fertilise the plains of Lombardy, that Attila stood alone, on the evening of the day following his meeting with Theodore. He had sent on messengers to demand the peaceful surrender of the city; and he had promised, in simple, but direct terms, that if no resistance were shown, no violence should be offered. The citizens, without any means of defence, gladly embraced the chance of safety; and Attila, entering with a few thousand men, occupied the public places and buildings; while the innumerable army that followed him lay encamped upon the mighty hills that sweep up round about the town, and the trembling inhabitants, shut up in their houses, waited in terrified expectation, hoping that the monarch's promise might be kept, but fearing lest it should be broken.

Attila stood alone; and little could he have brooked that any eye should behold the unwonted emotions that then shook his firm unbending nature. To all his host it had become evident, indeed, that since his encounter with Ætius a great change had come upon him; that his mind had lost a portion of its mighty calmness; that his strong passions had been gradually triumphing over the powerful intellect which had alone sufficed to rule them. But none had ever beheld him moved, as he now was moved; and Attila himself, finding that he was shaken by the tempest within his breast, as he had never before suffered himself to be, grew fierce at his own weakness, and added to his own emotions by his very anger at not being able to suppress them; and yet those emotions were not displayed like the passions of ordinary men.

He stood in that hall alone, and remained for many minutes with his eyes bent sternly on the ground, while over his harsh features passed a thousand shades of varying expression. But his form at first seemed calm; and the only movement perceptible through his whole frame was the clasping and the unclasping of his left hand upon the hilt of his massy sword. At length, however, he broke from that quiescent attitude, and strode quickly up and down the hall, then paused again, and once more gazed upon the marble pavement, enriched by the beautiful art of ancient Rome, with a thousand flowers and fruits smiling up out of the cold stone.

But the eye of Attila saw not the rich mosaic over which it wandered; and after another deep long pause, he exclaimed, 'Why should I not? Is he not my slave, my prisoner? Is not his life and all he has mine own? That which I left to him upon sufferance, can I not resume when I will? By all the gods I will do it! He has had favours enough at my hands already. He may well sacrifice something to gratify Attila!' And again he fell into a fit of musing, which was

at length broken by the door of the hall being slowly opened, and Onegisus, one of his most attached chieftains, entering with a cautious and apprehensive step.

'So,' said Attila, speaking to himself—'So—So will I do it. I would not see his grief, nor hear his complaints——Ha! Onegisus! What seekest thou?'

'Pardon me, mighty king!' replied the chieftain; 'I come from thy son Ellac. He finds not food enough for his troops upon the mountains, and he would fain force these dronish citizens to give up the stores they have concealed from us in their houses.'

'Thou meanest, he would fain plunder the city,' replied Attila sternly. 'But it must not be: Attila has pledged his word. Tell him to seek for food in the valleys, or if his troops be women, who cannot bear an evening's hunger, let him lead them down into the plains beyond. There shall he find food enough!—Yet stay, Onegisus, I would speak with thee on another matter. Ellac was busy at mine ear to-day with the beauty of this maiden, this Roman girl, who, some people say, is to be the bride of Theodore. Thinkest thou,' he continued, putting on a tone of indifference—'thinkest thou that Ellac covets her for himself?—That cannot be, you know, unless she herself be willing; for I have promised protection both to him and her.'

'Not so, oh mighty king!' replied Onegisus, casting down his eyes, and, to speak but truth, appearing pained and embarrassed—'not so: Ellac has but lately taken unto himself a bride, as thou well knowest, and he seeks no other. He did but think that this maiden was too beautiful to be cast away upon a stranger. Perhaps he fancied that she were fair enough even to attract the love of such a king as Attila himself.'

'Vain talk!' cried Attila, sharply. 'She is very beautiful, it is true—as fair, perhaps, as the eye of man has ever seen—but Attila has other thoughts before him. Conquest! Victory! Onegisus: they shall be the brides of Attila. Bear Ellac my message, and tell Arderic I would take counsel with him.'

Onegisus retired without reply, and Attila remained waiting the coming of Arderic; but the monarch had, with the words he had spoken, resumed his habitual self-command: the sound of his own voice had recalled him to himself; and no trace of the varying passions which had lately agitated him could now be seen upon his countenance.

But, alas! Attila was not what Attila had been. The firm immovable nature which he now assumed had then been really his own. He had formerly been what he now appeared. A change, a sad change, had come over him since he had fought without conquering. He felt fallen from that height of irresistible power which he had once possessed: he felt irritated at its loss; angry with himself for the very irritation that he felt; and obliged to have recourse to duplicity to conceal the change from himself and others. For that duplicity again he contemned himself, and gave way to many a wilder passion, which had formerly been controlled, in order to relieve his thoughts from irksome contemplation. He conquered almost all external appearances, however; the victory of his internal enemy was within. With him it was like a sudden strife in a banquet-hall, where contention raged fiercely in scenes that had once been calm, and where few signs betrayed to those without that fury and wrath struggled within those halls, from the windows of which the lights beamed calmly, except when a passing shadow flitting rapidly across told of some violent movement, the nature of which could hardly be divined.

Thus seating himself in an ivory chair, that stood at the farther side of the hall, he waited for his friend and counsellor with a calm countenance, playing with the hilt of his sword, and apparently listening to the murmurs of the river as it flowed by the building, and gazing upon the changeful light and shade as it danced upon the blue masses of the opposite mountains.

Arderic, however, was not long ere he appeared; but it was evident that there was some degree of embarrassment upon his countenance.

'Hast thou seen this new ambassador, my friend?' demanded Attila, as soon as he approached. 'Hast thou seen this Apollonius?'

'I have, oh king,' replied Arderic; but there he paused, and spoke no farther.

'What said he then?' exclaimed the monarch of the Huns impatiently. 'Why art thou such a niggard of thy words, my friend? What answer gives the puppet on the eastern throne unto our just demand? What says he to our contract with Theodosius? Has he sent the tribute therein promised?'

'No tribute has he sent, oh Attila!' replied the King of the Gepidæ, looking suddenly up, as if forced at length to tell unpleasant tidings, and resolved to tell them plainly. 'No tribute has he sent, oh Attila! and touching the contract he replies, that it was only between Attila and a monarch that is dead; and that Marcian is not Theodosius. Farther, he declares, that he will have no talk of tribute; and he bids your own ambassador say, that Marcian has gold for his friends, but steel for his enemies.'

Attila had remained with his left hand resting on his sword; but as he heard the bold reply of Marcian to his demands upon the eastern empire, the long sinewy fingers clasped upon the hilt; and though he uttered not a

word, he drew the blade half out of its sheath in the agony of suppressed rage, while his white teeth might be seen shut close together, as if to imprison in his own breast the angry thoughts that struggled vehemently to burst forth. In the meanwhile Arderic, who had now told the worst, and whose purpose was to soothe rather than to irritate the Hunnish sovereign, hastened to add what he thought might, in some degree, mitigate his wrath. 'Nevertheless so, Attila,' he said, 'though this man's words and actions are bold indeed, yet he is not without that reverence for the fame and might of Attila which all inferior kings must feel; and this ambassador, this Apollonius, is loaded with presents far more costly and splendid than ever were wrung from the weakness of Theodosius.'

Attila sprang up from his seat, and grasping firmly the arm of Arderic, he gazed sternly in his face, exclaiming, 'Seek not to soothe me, Arderic, seek not to restrain my wrath! It is vain! It is unnecessary! The conduct of Attila shall not be governed by rage! Indignation shall have no share therein! Policy shall rule all: my conduct is determined; has been long determined, Arderic; and thou shalt see that, provoked even to the utmost, Attila can play the lamb till the time be come for him to play the lion! Slaves, oh!' he continued, raising his voice; and instantly a number of attendants rushed into the room, amongst the first of whom was Zercon, the black jester of his dead brother Bleda.

There was something in the sight that seemed to irritate the king, and, fixing his flashing eyes upon the hump-backed Moor, he cried, 'Who bid thee hither? What dost thou, listening to the king's private counsel? Take him away, take the foul impotent lump away, and strike the eaves-dropping ears from off his head! Away with him! Answer not, but let it be done!—Thou!' he continued, to one of the attendants who had followed—'Thou! Get thee to this ambassador from the East. Tell him that Attila has not time to give attention to such trifling things as the tribute due from Marcian; but that as soon as he has a moment for lighter affairs, and things of no importance, he will see him. In the meantime, let him deliver the presents that he bears unto my officers. Hence! Do my bidding quickly!'

The attendants withdrew, without a second warning; and Attila resumed his conversation with Arderic, who felt not a little relieved to find that the mighty king to whom he had attached himself could still so far govern his rage as to consult the dictates of good policy, rather than those impulses of passion, to which he had but too frequently given way since his encounter with Ætius.

'I have thought over all this, my friend,' said Attila calmly, 'since a conversation which I held yesterday with the young Roman, Theodore.'

Arderic marvelled somewhat at the cold epithet which Attila bestowed upon Theodore, whom during the two or three last years he had been accustomed to call, not the young Roman, but 'my son,' or, 'my adopted son.' Nevertheless, he was well pleased that the conversation of Theodore had produced such an effect, and he replied, 'Thy conduct, oh Attila! shows that you have considered well, and, as ever, have determined wisely.'

'I think I have, my friend,' replied Attila; 'for if I had not, indignation would have trampled upon reason, and I should have been tempted to abandon that in which I am engaged, to tread upon the neck of the dog that thus snarls at my heels. But, as I have told thee, ever since that conversation, I have thought over this. The youth, it seems, has known this Marcian for many years, and tells me that he is, as he shows himself, bold, cautious, and vigilant. Now, though Valentinian and Marcian separately are but as scorpions, on which Attila would set his sandal's sole without a fear, yet the bite of the two might be dangerous, or at least painful. As it is, Ætius, possessed of Gaul, and planning to raise himself up there a separate kingdom, looks on not unwillingly while I crush the petty sovereign whom he has long despised and ruled. But if Marcian, joined to Valentinian, were to give the western emperor a chance of resisting Attila with success, Ætius would be obliged to untite his forces to theirs, lest, at an after period, they should march together to punish the rebellious or negligent subject, who left them to struggle unassisted against the mighty power of the Huns.'

'Wisely and well hast thou considered all things, oh Attila! I, less politic, had only thought of the union of Marcian with Valentinian as dangerous to us. But if the power of the east and the west were swelled by all the forces of Gaul, armies might be collected which, perchance, we should find to be overwhelming. How, then, oh Attila, do you purpose to deal with Marcian?'

'As a skilful fowler, Arderic, when he approaches his half sleeping game, coming nearer and nearer, while he pretends to be looking and going another way. We will treat his ambassador as if angry, but not enraged past all endurance. We will send him back with messages regarding the tribute, which will seem as if we were more covetous of gold than of honour, and would, perhaps, take a part, if we could not obtain the whole. Thus shall he lull himself with embassies; while we, marching on, sweep Valentinian from the earth, lay Rome in ashes, and scatter

the dusty fragments of her once mighty power unto all the quarters of the earth over which her empire in other days extended. Still as we advance and conquer, as if wholly absorbed in the great undertaking before us, we will make greater and greater concessions to this Marcian, and he, if he be a true Roman, will exact more and more, till at length, with justice on our side, and conquest on our sword, our strength united and increased, and our troops fresh from victory, we will pour into the fertile plains of Greece, and, with our free and martial tribes, leave not a trace of any former yoke throughout the land. If my foot shall ever again tread the plains of Thrace, never again, so guard me all the gods, who have made me what I am, will I go back one single step, so long as one stone of all Byzantium stands upon another!'

He was still going on when a door at the farther end of the hall opened, and the attendant, whom he had sent to the ambassador, presented himself. The man paused for a moment, with a pale countenance, as if uncertain whether to advance or not. He was evidently under the influence of terror; but Attila's irritation had subsided while pouring forth his plans into the ear of Arderic, and he made the attendant a sign to advance, with an expression of countenance which partly re-assured him. Hurrying forward, then, he cast himself prostrate at the feet of the king, exclaiming, 'How shall I dare, oh mighty Attila, to relate the bold words of the most insolent Roman that ever approached thy presence?'

'Speak, speak!' said Attila: 'thou art pardoned, if any pardon be needful, for repeating what it imports the king to hear. Speak! what said the ambassador?'

'His reply, oh king,' answered the attendant, looking up, and half doubting the assurances of pardon that he heard—'his reply was, 'Tell Attila the king, that though the time of the servant of Marcian is of less value than the time of the monarch of the Huns, yet the dignity of the emperor must not be trifled with, and his ambassador is not one to sacrifice it. If Attila be willing to see me, let him fix the time and keep it. Hither have I followed him to Tridentum, from the wilds of Upper Dacia, and I will follow no farther, to be a spectacle to his nation, or to others. As to the presents, they are of little import; some thirty vases of solid gold, and some caskets of jewels; but if Attila would have them, he must receive them with his own hands. To him were they sent, and to none other will I deliver them." Such were his words, oh mighty king,' continued the attendant—'I have repeated them truly, and if I have offended, let me die!'

To the surprise of the attendant, and even of Arderic, something like a grim smile passed over the harsh features of the Hunnish king. 'He is a bold knave, this ambassador,' he said, 'he is a bold knave and well chosen to do a dangerous embassy! Tell him to get him hence, and take his presents with him! Say also, that Attila, though he loves courage, will not bear insolence, and therefore it is, he will not see this man. However, he is not willing to lose the friendship of Marcian, who promises to fill the royal seat of the old Cæsars more nobly than late monarchs have done, and therefore Attila will send back unto him Theodore, the son of his friend Paulinus, with power to treat of things that concern the friendship of the two nations. He shall accompany the ambassador on his way. Go! tell him the words of the king.'

Arderic, at the mention of the mission of Theodore, suddenly cast down his eyes and bit his lip; and as soon as the attendant had risen from Attila's feet and departed, he exclaimed, 'Hear me, oh Attila, and take thought before you determine upon sending this young Roman on such a task to the new emperor. Theodore is bold and faithful, I know it well, and love him truly. But he is one of those who will think his duty to his country superior to aught else on earth. He will reveal to Marcian all your plans and purposes, tell all the secrets of your court, and of the past, as far ss may affect the future, and think it a duty to caution Marcian against trusting to the semblance of moderation you put on.'

'Wouldst thou do so, Arderic, if thou wert a Roman?' asked Attila, with a smile; and then, before his friend could answer, he added, 'Perhaps thou wouldst. In truth, I believe so. But I am prepared against that also, Arderic. This Theodore has now with him a beautiful—a most lovely girl—his promised bride; and even to-morrow morning he fondly thinks she shall be his. He is mistaken, Arderic; for I will keep her and her mother here, as sureties for his doing my bidding to the letter—as hostages for his speedy return. However strong may be his wishes to serve his country, be you sure that nature and passion will have its way. What is it that passion will not do? To what will it not blind our eyes? What will it not make us see, in things the most different? With this Theodore, it will act to give the fairest colouring to everything that may keep Marcian at peace with Attila, and give him the opportunity of returning speedily, to claim his beautiful Dalmatian bride. He will tell no tales, Arderic! He will give no advice! He will speak no warnings, that may raise up an eternal barrier between him and that most lovely woman! He will think he does his duty to his country, and will do it, as far as

nature will let him; but passion will still have a voice in the council of his bosom, and make him do his duty unto me!'

Arderic made no reply, but looked gravely down upon the ground, and Attila fixed his eyes upon him for several moments, as if in surprise at his silence. But there was something in the breast of Attila, a consciousness, a sense of duplicity, even towards Arderic, which made him forbear to question his friend. Attila was afraid to ask why Arderic replied not! Attila, the mighty, the unconquered, the unconquerable Attila, was cowed by his own heart! Yes, Attila was afraid!

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### THE BITTER DISAPPOINTMENT.

It was the same hall, but the things within it were changed. It blazed with lights; it was crowded with people; and the leaders of the Hunnish host stood round Attila the king, while in the clear deep tones of command, he gave directions for their march on the following day. On his left hand, at some distance from the chair in which he sat, appeared a group in the Roman dress, consisting of Ildica, Ammian, Eudochia, and Theodore, with a number of the household slaves of Flavia, and the barbarian followers of the young Roman gathered together behind them.

Seated in the midst of her children was Flavia, the only person, except the monarch, who did not stand; but there was the weariness of illness on her face and in her attitude, and the chair she occupied had been looked upon by her and her family as a token of Attila's kind observation.

Suddenly the tones of Attila ceased as he gave his last commands to the leaders round him, and then, after a pause, he exclaimed, 'Theodore! come hither, my son; the king has a duty to impose on thee!'

Theodore gave a bright glance to Ildica, and advanced till he stood before the monarch, his countenance beaming with happy anticipations, and his heart beating high with the glad hope of soon bearing his sweet bride back to their own dear land. But the countenance of Attila was stern and grave; and Arderic, who stood on his right hand, cast down his eyes as Theodore approached.

'My son,' said Attila, 'thou art very young, and yet unto thee am I about to entrust a mission on which may depend the lives of millions, the fate of empires, and the destiny of the whole world. The monarch of the East has sent unto me hither a bold and insolent ambassador; and were I to read the feelings of Marcian in the conduct of his messenger, I should instantly employ those arms which carried death and victory to the shores of the Ægean Sea not many years ago, to humble the pride and punish the faithlessness of this new emperor. But I have heard what thou canst tell of him—thou who hast known him from thy childhood; and Attila is inclined to respect and love Marcian. Attila may be his friend, if Marcian will; for while he treads upon the worm, and struggles with the tiger, he admires the lion and the eagle—kings in their kind like himself. Go then to this thy friend: return to him with the ambassador he has sent hither, and tell him the words of Attila. Say, if thou wilt, that on thy report of his great nobleness, Attila desires rather to be at peace than at war with Marcian; and ask what he will do to gain our friendship. It is not the pitiful thought of a few ounces more or less of yellow earth that moves Attila, and if Marcian be poor, let him say so; but justice Attila will have in all things, and his honour and dignity will he defend so long as he has life. Go, then, to Marcian; tell him these things. Tell him what Attila is, and bring us speedily thine answer. If thou usest diligence, thou wilt find us between this and Rome. Seek the envoy from the East, and depart with him. Thou shalt have the train of a prince to honour Attila's mission, and gold to pay thy journey through a sordid land, and amongst a grasping people.'

'Willingly, oh Attila!' replied Theodore, 'do I accept the charge; and honouring thee, as I do from the depth of my heart, for all the noble deeds that I have seen, and loving thee for all the kind ones thou hast done to me and mine, I will labour with the zeal of true affection to do thy bidding well.'

As he spoke, a red flush came over Attila's forehead; and a large vein that wandered through the brown skin of his uncovered temples swelled and wreathed like a snake caught under the fork of an husbandman. Theodore, however, marked not the unwonted emotion, and went on. 'Nor do I doubt,' he said, 'success is my undertaking; for, in the same manner, do I love and honour Marcian for the same noble deeds and the same kindness unto me and mine. I hope, I trust, I think that he loves me too, and therefore do I judge that I, perchance—however young and inexperienced I may be—that I may succeed better than one older and a stranger. Give me but to-morrow for repose, and on the following day I am ready to set out.'

'Thanks for thy willingness, my son,' replied Attila, 'and thanks also for thy love; but thy young limbs scarcely do need repose, and the time thou seekest cannot be afforded thee. By the first ray of light to-morrow morning this insolent ambassador must leave the camp, and thou must go with him on the way.'

Theodore's countenance fell. 'Alas!' he said, 'I have told thee, oh king! that after

many a painful year of absence I have found and brought with me my promised bride, one to whom my heart is tied by bonds of old affection, with whom my childish hours were spent, to whom the thoughts of youth have all been given——' Attila made an impatient gesture with his hand. 'Thou hast thyself promised, oh king,' added Theodore quickly, 'to witness and confirm our union.'

'And so I will,' answered Attila sharply, 'when thou returnest from the mission on which I send thee.'

'Oh let it be before,' exclaimed Theodore eagerly—'oh let it be before. I ask but a day, a single day, and then all can go with me to our native land, my bride, my mother, my sister, and her promised husband, Ammian. Once more re-established in peace, in the bright country of our birth, all my hopes will be fulfilled, and——'

'And thou wilt never return to Attila,' said the deep voice of the king.

'On my life, on my soul, on my hopes of happiness in this life and hereafter,' exclaimed Theodore vehemently, 'I will return if I be in life, ere two months be over, and bring thee an account of my mission and its success.'

'It cannot be,' said Attila sternly—'it must not, and it cannot be. Youth, I will not tempt thee by granting thy request. We are all subject to be led astray. Nature is strong within us, is stronger far than all good resolutions; and with thy bride, thy mother, and thy family, beneath the shield of Marcian, in thy native land, thou wouldst have strong temptation to remain, and bitter agony of heart to leave them all and come back hither. I say not that the frail thread which bound thee to return would even then be broken; but I say that Attila will never willingly stretch it more than it is formed to bear. Thy mother and thy bride shall stay with me, not as a pledge for thy good faith, for even wert thou to prove faithless, Attila would never injure those beneath his protection; but as inducements to make thy return speedy and joyful. Thy bridal must not be till thou hast seen Marcian, and return to me. Attila has said it, and his words are not revoked.'

The angry blood rushed up into Theodore's cheek, and his eyes sparkled as few were accustomed to flash in the presence of that mighty and terrible monarch. 'Then, oh king,' he exclaimed in a sharp voice, 'then, oh king——'

But at that moment a hand was laid upon his arm, and Flavia, anticipating the refusal that was about to burst from his lips, stood by his side, saying, in a low voice, 'Go, my son, go! obey the will of the king!' but her interposition seemed to come too late, for the dark thunder-cloud of wrath had gathered heavy on the brow of Attila; and while the chieftains near gazed with painful apprehension on the unwonted signs of emotion which he had suffered to appear, he demanded, in a voice that rolled like distant thunder round the hall, 'Darest thou dispute the commands of Attila?'

Theodore's eyes quailed not, however, under that fierce glance; and, with his spirit all in arms, as it was at that moment, he might have replied with words that would have sealed his fate for ever: but without waiting to hear him speak, Ildica, trembling with apprehension for him she loved, but filled with energetic resolution by that very love itself, glided past him, and, kneeling at the feet of Attila, raised her hands towards him in earnest supplication.

'Forgive him, oh mighty king!' she cried, 'forgive him! He will go willingly; he will go, and do thy bidding truly and faithfully. I, I will be the hostage for his faith and his obedience. Forgive him, oh forgive him! and let not your great soul be moved by the momentary rashness of one who loves thee well, and will serve thee, as he has served, honestly, truly, bravely, zealously.'

The cloud cleared away from the brow of Attila, as he gazed upon that beautiful creature kneeling at his feet, and he replied at once, 'He is forgiven; let him do our bidding, and return. We will protect thee and thy mother till he comes again, and none shall harm thee. Thou art rash, oh Theodore, and hasty in thy youth; but Attila is great enough to be able to forgive: and, to show thee that thou art quite forgiven, we will grant thee one favour. But yesterday we were told that yon youth, Ammian thou callest him, and the maiden, thy sister, were plighted to each other, and that for his and her sake it was that thou fleddest from Valentinian. Thou thyself must return to seek thy bride and her mother; but if thou wilt, thy sister, ere the earth be three days older, shall give her hand to him, and follow thee with our presents to the court of Marcian.'

Theodore turned with a melancholy smile to Ammian and Eudochia, who, in the anxiety of the moment, had advanced to his side. He saw happiness in the bright eyes of the one, and in the blushing downcast face of the other; and then, looking again towards Attila, he replied, 'My bitter disappointment, oh king! shall neither make me selfish nor ungrateful. I receive your offer as a favour, and am thankful for it as such. Let their union take place, oh king, as speedily as may be, and let them join me in Thrace. It will take, at least, from my mind part of the load which bears it down, to see them in peace and security.'

'Be it so, then,' replied Attila—'be it so. They shall follow thee quickly. Thou knowest thy mission; thou knowest my will. Early

to-morrow morning, with thine own attendants, and those that I shall send unto thee, thou settest out for Constantinople. So fare thee well upon thy journey! All now may go—Attila seeks rest.'

With a sad but calm brow Theodore led Ildica and Flavia from the great hall of the palace of Tridentum, to a distant part of the same building, in which a lodging had been assigned to them. Eudochia and Ammian followed: but no one spoke for some time; till at length, when they re-entered the chamber from which they had been summoned to the presence of Attila, Ildica raised her eyes, and gazed sorrowfully in the face of her lover. Flavia, too, paused and looked upon them for a moment with a sad and heavy heart, and then, beckoning to Ammian and Eudochia, she quitted the room, and left the two alone.

Ildica cast herself upon the bosom of Theodore, and they both wept bitterly. 'Oh, my Theodore! oh, my beloved!' cried Ildica, as soon as tears would let her.

He pressed her to his heart in silence; but ere he could find words to reply, the door of the chamber was thrown open by one of the household slaves of Flavia, crying, 'One of the barbarian kings, noble Theodore, would speak with you instantly;' and almost as he spoke, Arderic entered the chamber. The King of the Gepidæ pointed to the door, and the slave, who gazed upon him with some wonder, instantly closed it and retired. Then, advancing to Theodore, Arderic took him in his powerful arms, and pressed him frankly to his bosom.

'Theodore, my brother,' he said, speaking the language of the Huns, which Ildica did not understand—'Theodore, I love you well, and grieve for you. We have fought together, and been enemies; we have eaten bread together, and been friends. Our enmity has been wiped out, our friendship never can; and I think that Attila deals hardly with thee.—But look to thy fair bride,' he continued, 'she looks pale and faint: let her go from us; I will not keep thee long; but yet I would fain speak with thee, ere thou departest.'

'Ildica, my beloved,' said Theodore, in the Latin tongue, but speaking slowly, so that Arderic might hear and comprehend what he said, 'this is one of my best and noblest friends. While I am absent, thou mayest trust safely in him. He has something of importance to tell me, and I will seek thee again instantly!'

Ildica made no reply, but retired into the inner chamber, to her mother.

'Thou hast spoken truly, my friend,' continued Arderic: 'she may trust in me when you are gone! and she may have cause to trust. Attila has dealt hardly with thee, I know not why. I love not to inquire. Let me not wrong him by suspicions; but ever since that fatal battle in Gaul he has been an altered man. Had he been always thus, he would never have reached the height of power he has attained. He has grown more like his brother Bleda, jealous, hasty, intemperate—ay, and deceitful too. He may hide his future purposes from mine eyes, perchance; but Arderic knows that he is changed, and is upon his guard.'

'I see it too,' cried Theodore—'I see it too; but even if this change bodes ill to me, what can I do to guard myself against it? What evil, think you, he meditates against me?'

'Nay, I cannot tell,' said Arderic: 'I know not, nor will pretend to guess; and as to guarding against it, I can give but one advice—return as speedily as may be. Lose no time; fear not to kill your horses; and as you named two months to Attila himself, be not a single hour beyond that time, as you value happiness and peace.'

'But why,' exclaimed Theodore, 'why think you that his wrath points more particularly to me?'

'I know not well how to answer,' replied Arderic. 'When we see a dull grey vapour gathering over the western sky, we say there will be a tempest soon. When we see the light clouds making the mottled heaven look like a dappled steed, we augur it will rain. Light signs forbode heavy storms; and when I see many a changeful variation in the mood of a man once so firm and steadfast, I am apt to augur evil, and to guess where it may fall. Towards you, to whom he was once kind as the spring rain, Attila is now harsh and fierce, and I argue thence that, for some cause, you have lost that favour which shielded you hitherto. But there is another reason why I bid you be upon your guard. You once tarried long, I have heard, in the house of Bleda, the brother of the king, and must have often seen his daughter Neva.'

'Often, very often,' answered Theodore: 'a sweet, devoted, beautiful girl, whose whole happiness seemed to rest in doing good to others. But I injured her not!'

'Thy fate seems of deep interest to her,' replied Arderic, with a passing smile, 'for she sought me out this evening, as we were encamping on the hills——'

'Is she here, then?' cried Theodore, in surprise.

'Yes, and thousands of others,' answered Arderic: 'the camp is full of women. One would guess we were going to people some uncultivated land, for we bear almost all our women and children with us. But Neva is here; for, alas, poor girl, her home is now desolate. Her mother died some few weeks ago.—But, as I have said, not only the men of the land, but the women of the land also, have come forth to war.'

'Then I shall leave my Ildica,' said Theodore, 'with a lighter heart. Where there are women, she will find some to pity and console her.'

'Many, I trust,' answered Arderic; 'but let me tell you, for the time wears, that this fair girl, Bleda's daughter, for whose orphan state my heart has often ached, sought me out this evening, and, calling you "her brother Theodore," besought me to aid and to support you against your enemies. Her words were somewhat wild and rambling; but it was evident she had reasons to fear that evil threatened you.'

'Upon the journey?' demanded Theodore.

'No, no!' rejoined Arderic. 'I cannot tell you my own suspicions: I must not repeat the words she spoke. We may be both mistaken; and even were we right, our warning could be of no avail, if you neglect to follow the advice I have given. Hasten to Marcian; lose not an hour upon the road; fulfil your mission quickly, and bring back a reply, or good or bad, without delay. Suffer yourself not to be entangled by any one in long discussions; but simply tell your message, receive your answer, and return within the space that you yourself have mentioned. In your absence I will protect, as far as may be, the precious pledges that you leave behind: my wife is in the camp; and though she speaks not their tongue, our hearts, oh Theodore! shall speak for us. Arderic has some power, and it shall be used for your service. Now fare you well, for I must leave you;' and pressing Theodore once more in his arms, he turned and quitted the apartment.

The young Roman paused for a moment in deep thought; and then, with a heavy heart, sought those from whom he was to part so soon.

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## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### THE MARRIAGE AND THE DEATH.

TRENT was still in possession of the Huns—though the main body of their innumerable host had passed on—when, on the third day after the departure of Theodore, two young and beautiful beings stood before the altar of the high church of that venerable city, in youth's brightest day to pass youth's brightest hour. There is certainly, in that peculiar moment of happiness in which the young heart of woman plights its full faith to the man she loves, a beautifying influence, which gives to features, not otherwise remarkable, a loveliness of expression that they possess not at other times. It is the beaming forth of the sweet chastened joy of fulfilled hope and gratified love: it is the picture, presented by the speaking face, of many of those beautiful feelings whereof external loveliness is but the type and symbol. Joy, timid modesty, pure affection, bright hope, unshaken faith, the fruition of long nourished wishes, the fulfilment of the brightest expectation of a woman's heart—all, all are there when she kneels before the altar with the man she loves, to bind that solemn tie which nothing but the grave should break.

There knelt Eudochia by the side of Ammian; and though a slight shade of sympathising melancholy stole across the sunshine of her face, when she turned her eyes on Ildica, yet her look was as bright as hope and happiness could make it, and in the serious but still enthusiastic countenance of her young lover might be read, in its very gravity, a deeper happiness than ever his lighter smiles betrayed.

Ildica, poor Ildica, had twined the flowers in the fair bride's hair; and though a tear had fallen upon them, spangling their sweet leaves like a drop of morning dew, yet she had struggled hard to banish every selfish regret, and share to the full in the joy of those dear beings, whose union, and, as she trusted, whose happiness, that day was to secure.

Beside Ildica stood her mother; but, oh! what a sad change had the passing of less than five years wrought in the fair form of Flavia, since first we saw her on the bright shores of the Adriatic. She had known grief, deep grief, before that period; she had tasted disappointment, and undergone misfortune of many kinds: but there is a time of life, when the springs of health, and sources of enjoyment, flow up so full and bounteously, that the most scorching heat cannot dry them up; when the earthquake itself cannot overwhelm them; when still they flow on, under the fiercest sun of summer, and are but choked up in one place to burst forth and sparkle in another. But there comes an after period, when, choked up, and nearly obliterated by the sands of time, the fire of lesser misfortunes will exhaust them quite, and leave the empty fountain, the dried up spring, without a drop of water to moisten the lip of hope. So had it been with Flavia: the misfortunes of her early years, the loss of her loved husband, the tyranny of a capricious and greedy monarch, an anxious widowhood, watching over her orphan children, had rendered the stream of life calm and dull, but had not diminished its waters, nor seemed likely to shorten its course. But when a later epoch of existence had come on, and fresh sorrows, labours, anxieties, and cares, had fallen fast about her, the very hopes she had nourished, and the placid joys, which had rendered life verdant, faded by the wintry blast of late disappointment, like the withered leaves of winter trees above a fountain, had dropped fast and thick, and filled up the very well of life itself. Her step was feeble; her once bright eye was

dim; and though the graceful line of that fair form remained, though the black hair was little more silvery than before, and the white teeth had lost none of their ivory purity, yet the pallor of her countenance, the bloodless lip, the languid drooping eyelid, and the quick, difficult respiration, all spoke that 'the body was broken by its cares and labours,' and the spirit, weary of its ruined tenement, was hesitating whether it should not fly for repose.

She gazed, however, with a bright and cheering smile upon Ammian and Eudochia, as they knelt to pledge that sacred vow, which she, too, hoped and believed would secure for them as much happiness as this world could bestow. She herself felt within her bosom rise up at the sight, the memory of bright hopes, and aspirations passed away, and the spring of life for the moment flowed more freely. They, as they looked upon her, saw a happy change, and gladdened their own hearts by the thought that her health was better, and looked forward to the future, with hopes for her as well as for themselves.

Others, however, were present in the church; and Attila himself, with arms folded on his bosom, stood not inattentive to the words which a Christian priest addressed to the fair young beings met together there, to be parted no more. The priest was a venerable and a fearless man; and after his blessing had been spoken, and the indissoluble contract sealed, he poured forth an exhortation to maintain and hold fast the purer faith, in which they had been educated, touching boldly on the doctrines of his holy religion as contrasted with the pagan superstition of many who heard him, and appealing to the consciences of all men to decide whether sublime purity of soul and body were not the doctrines which God might teach, and men revere.

Attila listened in silence, though many of the barbarian chieftains around frowned angrily to hear their ancient faith assailed from the lips of one of a people whom they looked upon as conquered and trodden under foot. Attila, however, listened as we have said, in silence; and only twice during all that ceremony did he take his eyes from the priest, to turn them for a moment upon the lovely countenance of Ildica, and glance over that unrivalled form which might well have made the sculptor blush at his imperfect works. They were withdrawn as quickly as turned thither, and he fixed them on the priest again, and listened to his glowing eloquence as one who could admire, though unconvinced.

The ceremony was over, the prayer prayed, the exhortation made. The feet of Ammian's horse were heard without pawing impatiently the ground; the litter which was to bear Eudochia into Thrace was prepared; the slaves who were to accompany her, and the guards which Attila had directed to conduct them in safety to the frontiers of the eastern empire, stood ready before the gate. But when the bridegroom and the bride rose up from the altar, without turning to bid their mother farewell, they advanced hand in hand to Attila, and knelt together at his feet.

'Oh, great king!' said Ammian, 'thou hast made us happy, and we have to beseech thee to add yet one favour more. To return unto our native land is joy, for we love no land like that; but if our mother return not with us, the joy withers, and like a flower in the night, it may be beautiful, but we cannot see it, for want of the sunshine to make it expand. Let us beseech thee, then, oh king! crown thy great goodness unto us, and either let our mother and our sister bear us company on the way, or let us remain here till they may go there too.'

Attila listened with the same calm steadfast look which, in former days, used never to be absent from his countenance; and no feature of his face could have betrayed the slightest emotion produced by the words of Ammian. When the youth had done he replied, 'Thy mother and thy sister must not depart; and I have promised the son of Paulinus that thou shouldst join him with his sister in Thrace.'

He paused for a moment, and thought deeply, turned his eyes to Ildica and Flavia, and then added, 'Nevertheless, ye shall stay or go, as your mother wills. If ye go not, the breach of the promise be upon you. Attila has prepared to fulfil it; but he will not, he cannot drive a son from a mother, and that mother ill as she is.'

Ammian and Eudochia rose and clung to Flavia, each exclaiming, 'Oh let us stay, my mother! let us stay till Theodore returns!'

Flavia pressed them to her heart, and kissed the fair brow of that sweet girl: but she did not reply for some moments; while Eudochia, linking her hand in that of Ildica, exclaimed, 'Plead for us, dear Ildica! Plead for us, my sister!' and Ildica turned her lustrous eyes upon her mother, as if doubting and inquiring what she should do.

To Flavia it was a moment of the most intense pain to which the heart of any mortal being can be subject.—It was the struggle of duty against the tenderest, the noblest, of human affections.—It was a dying mother placing one of her children in safety, with the certainty of never beholding him again, even while obliged to leave another in the midst of perils, without any support. It was a moment of most intense, intolerable pain; and yet she conquered it.

'Eudochia,' she said calmly, 'it must not be, my beloved child! Ammian, do not agitate and distress me! Theodore might

wait for you. Your staying might delay his return. At all events, it is but for a short time that we are parted,' and she raised her eyes to heaven, while her lips still moved, but in silence. 'Go, my children, go,' she said: 'hasten Theodore's return; bear him my blessing.'

'Must it be, my mother?' cried Ammian.

'It must, beloved!' answered Flavia, kissing him. 'Take her, oh take her from me,' she added, unclasping the arms of Eudochia, who clung round her knees weeping. 'Dear, affectionate girl, farewell! Take her Ammian, take her! God's blessing and her mother's be upon you, my sweet children!' Ammian raised Eudochia, and half bore, half led her from the church.

The eyes of Attila remained fixed upon the countenance of Flavia, with a deep, earnest, contemplative gaze, which might have been painful to her, had not other feelings absorbed every thought; and when, as Ammian and Eudochia disappeared through the portal, Flavia raised her robe to her eyes, and for the first time wept, Attila, the stern, dark Attila himself was moved, and pressing his sinewy hand upon his brow, he exclaimed aloud, 'Noble, noble woman!' Then turned and, as if stung by some sudden pang, strode hastily out of the church.

There came a sound of rude music from without, and of young voices singing, as a troop of boys and girls, gathered together for the marriage, accompanied Eudochia and Ammian on their way to the gate of the city. But oh, how strange and harsh sounded that bridal song upon the ears of the sad few who remained within the church! Flavia stood, and wept; and the large drops rolled slowly over the fair cheek of Ildica. But at length Arderic, who had not followed Attila when he departed, advanced, and in a kindly tone, which spoke to their hearts, notwithstanding his small knowledge of their language, bade them take comfort.

'Let us leave this place,' he said at length. 'You have need, lady, of repose: to-morrow morning, or at latest to-morrow night, the last of our forces quit Tridentum. It were needful for thee to pass all the intervening time in repose; and if thou wouldst take some simples, such as our people know well how to prepare, it might give thee strength for the journey. But let us quit this place—the sight of it only makes thee grieve.'

'Let those sounds cease without, and then I will go,' replied Flavia; and as soon as all was quiet in the street, the mother and the daughter, left alone in the midst of a strange and barbarous host, took their sad way back towards the dwelling which they had inhabited since their arrival in the city of Trent. There Arderic left them; and entering into their own apartments, Flavia sent away all the slaves.

As soon as she was alone with her daughter, to the surprise and grief of Ildica, the lady sunk upon her knees, at her own child's feet. 'Pardon me, Ildica, pardon your mother,' she said—'Pardon your mother, if, in the agony of this day, and in the anxiety to secure safety and happiness for one child, I have failed to purchase, even at his risk, support and protection for another.'

Ildica cast her arms around her, and striving hard to smile, she said, 'Alas, alas! dear mother, why should you ask pardon of me? Know you not that your Ildica would gladly, willingly, sacrifice everything, but virtue, and honour, and the love of those who love her, to secure the happiness of her dear brother, and the sweet sister of her infancy. Oh no, think not that I regret even for a moment that you have sent them from us, if by their presence they could not have comforted and supported you. Ildica has a resolute heart, my mother, and can bear, with strong determination, whatever fate her God may send her. With her own hand she can protect her honour, if need should be; and she fears nothing else: for death is little terrible to her, and that is the worst that can befall.'

'But, alas! you know not all, my child,' answered Flavia, sinking into the seat to which her daughter led her, but still holding Ildica's hand, and gazing in her face. 'Dear beloved girl, I am dying.'

'Speak not such cruel words, dear mother, replied Ildica, not knowing how terribly the ravager had proceeded in the frame of the loved being who was now her only support. 'I see, indeed,' she added, 'that you are far from well; but I trust that fatigue and anxiety is the chief cause, and that now you have seen so happy an event as the marriage of our dear Ammiam with Eudochia; now that you know them to be in safety; now that the speedy prospect of returning to our own land is open before us; now that nothing is wanting to our future peace and happiness but Theodore's return—I trust, I hope, I am sure, dear mother, that joy will prove a good physician, and restore you quite.'

'Ildica,' answered Flavia, 'let us not deceive ourselves, my child. I shall never see the Dalmatian shores again. How long this shattered prison may keep the struggling spirit in its ruined walls, I know not; but in my bosom there is kept a fatal calendar, whereon is marked how much each day takes from the small remaining store of life, and I feel that that store is nearly gone. Like a spendthrift with his treasure, Ildica, I would now fain hoard the little that remains, but know not how, and fear that it will fail me soon. When, five days ago, we halted by the little lake in

those grand mountains, I felt that death was coming, but still thought that repose might keep him yet at bay, and give me time to reach some surer resting-place. But in that day's repose, the active enemy still strode on his way; the next day's journey brought him nearer still; and the sad scene of your dear Theodore's parting led him onward almost to the door. I have shut my ear while he knocked, listening to Hope while Ammian's bridal has gone forward; but I felt that Death went with me into that church, and has come hither to sit beside me till I follow him to a brighter land, where the dark herald leaves us for ever at the gate.'

Ildica wept bitterly; and her mother, after pausing for several minutes, proceeded:—'Must I tell thee not to weep, my child? Nay, I will not do thee so much wrong! Yes, weep, my Ildica! weep as I would weep for thee; but listen to me. I have said that I felt myself dying when in yon church I sent from us Ammian and Eudochia. I sent them from us, knowing that I might soon have to leave thee here alone, in the midst of a barbarous people, till thy Theodore, thy husband, shall return—alone, with none to protect thee but domestic slaves, who, though faithful and attached, are still but slaves. Was not this cruel, Ildica? Wilt thou forgive me?'

'Forgive you, dear mother!' cried Ildica, looking up reproachfully at the very thought of forgiveness being necessary; 'think you that for my selfish sorrows I would have had Ammian and Eudochia stay in scenes of danger when peace, and joy, and safety were before them? If peril awaits me, Ammian could not, with his single hand have averted it. If Death be following me, too, in any shape, he could not have shielded me from the lifted dart; and—for the sake of a few kind words and tender consolations, the balm of sympathy, and the fine elixir of kind familiar looks to soothe and cure a wounded heart—think you, dear mother, that I would have perilled his young happiness, and perhaps cast the cloud of misfortune over his whole life? No, let me meet the coming ills alone. There are many with whom I would gladly share the cup of joy; but none whom I would force to drink a part of the bitterer draught which I am bound to quaff. Forgive you, dear mother! oh, there is nothing to forgive!'

'Dear Ildica,' cried Flavia, pressing her to her bosom, 'noble, beloved girl! Sure, sure I am that, through whatever scenes the will of heaven may lead you, you will bear up nobly still, and never, never forget that you are the daughter of a Roman. Remember, Ildica—oh, ever remember—the land and race from which you spring. Think of their great deeds and stedfast courage. Remember that, amongst the best and greatest of our ancient names, your father might have boldly, confidently written down his own; and, whenever difficulty or peril falls upon you, think how a Roman of old days would then have acted, and so act!'

'I will, my mother,' cried Ildica, sinking on her knees beside Flavia; 'I promise you, by all which is most sacred, that I will. Nothing shall ever make me forget that I am a patrician's child, bound by my nobility of blood to noble conduct. And should the time ever come that I must be tried, the names of my ancestors shall not be blotted out from the roll of fame by any weakness of mine. I promise it! I vow it!' and, with high resolution beaming in her beautiful eyes, she rose, and stood in the majesty of loveliness by her dying mother's side.

'May God bless you, and give you strength in all things, my true child!' Flavia answered; 'and yet, Ildica, avoid all such trials; turn from all such dangers when you may. Seek not for dangers, but act boldly in them. And now, my child, one more direction, and I leave you to the keeping of your own heart, and God's directing Spirit. If I should not live, which is, indeed, beyond all likelihood, to witness Theodore's return, let no vain sorrow for the dead restrain you from giving him your hand at once. If but a single day have passed since the grave has closed over me, meet at the altar with the tear of memory dimming the eye of hope; but delay not your union by a single hour. Wed him, my Ildica! wed your beloved without a hesitation; and fly with him, as speedily as may be, to our dear, beautiful land, where peace and safety shall attend you. To him, Ildica, to him only of all the world, could I give you without a fear, without a sigh—to him, noble, just, wise, brave, firm yet tender, generous yet prudent, ardent yet temperate. Oh, Ildica! oh that I could see that day! my last brightest hope, my fondest wish, my only remaining aspiration on this side of the grave would then be fulfilled; and, as calmly as for a happy sleep, I could lay down my head in the tomb, and say, "Come, quiet Death! life has all finished well!"'

The tears streamed anew down the cheeks of Ildica; and her mother, after a short pause, drew her gently to her, kissed her pure brow, and added, 'Now leave me, my sweet child, for one half hour. We shall both be the better of a brief solitude.'

Ildica withdrew without reply; for she sought not to add to her mother's emotions by emotions of her own. In her own chamber she turned the hour-glass, neither to fall short of nor to exceed the space of time that Flavia had appointed; and she would fain have bent her thoughts to contemplate all the frowning features of her present fate, and the still darker

countenance of the future. She felt, however, that to do so would unfit her mind for the task of soothing and consoling the last days of her mother; she felt that she might be shaken and overwhelmed by the burdens which she was destined at different times to bear, if she suffered imagination to attempt to raise them all up at once, in order to feel and try their weight. She resolved, then, that she would not contemplate them, until they came upon her one by one; and, murmuring the holy maxim of Him who alone could teach us the wisdom from on high, 'Sufficient for the day be the evil thereof,' she sank upon her knees, and passed the half hour in prayer. When she rose, she was calm and prepared, feeling that, though philosophy may teach us to resist firmly the evils of life, it is only religion that can teach us to bear them meekly.

Her mother received her with a smile; and she too was calmer—for the fatal truth had been spoken between them, the dark secret had been told; and Flavia herself, prepared to die, was glad to have prepared Ildica for her death. The rest of the day passed over tranquilly; and Flavia seemed relieved, and even better. There was a slight flush upon her cheek, which, though it was not exactly the rosy hue of health, gave a false appearance of returning powers. Her eye, too, was bright, and she breathed, or fancied that she breathed, with less difficulty. She cherished no hope, however; and Ildica was not deceived into the belief that her mother could recover. Her disposition had once been full of hope; but the spring had lain so long under a heavy weight, that it had lost its elasticity; and the evening passed calmly, but not cheerfully.

At length, towards her usual hour of retiring to rest, Flavia took out of a casket a golden bracelet of an antique form, and, laying it on her knee, gazed upon it thoughtfully. It had been the first present that she had received from her dead husband, and in all her wanderings, under every blast of adversity, that bracelet still had remained with her. She had worn it on the shores of Dalmatia; it had been carried forth amidst the rocking of the earthquake; it had been restored, with other property, at the command of Attila, after having been taken by the Huns; she had possessed it amongst the Alani; she had carried it with her to Rome; she had brought it thence to where she sat even then. Every night, through a long life, she had gazed upon that token of early affection; and now, with her thoughts turning to her husband, she looked upon it again, thinking, 'I go to join him, where we shall never be separated more!'

As she thus thought, she tried to clasp it on her arm; but suddenly it slipped from her fingers, rolled from her knee, and dropped upon the ground. With a quick motion she stooped forward to catch it ere it fell, or pick it up. Then suddenly pressed her hand upon her breast, and sunk back upon the cushions that supported her, exclaiming, 'My child! my Ildica!'

Ildica darted forward, and caught the hands that her mother now extended towards her. The lips of Flavia still moved, but no sound followed: she fixed her eyes, with a look of deep love, upon her child; the brightness of being was still there; the flame of life's lamp shone in them still brightly; but, in a moment after, it waxed dim and faint: light and life, lustre and meaning, passed away; the jaw fell, the features became rigid, and the grey hue of vacant death spread over the soulless countenance. A loud long shriek rang through those apartments; and when the slaves rushed in, they found their mistress dead, where she sat, and her daughter lying senseless at her feet.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### THE ANTICIPATIONS OF EVIL.

LONG and dark was the sleep that fell upon Ildica: the over-wrought mind, the over-excited feelings, the heart and brain, stretched beyond their bearing to support each other, had worked in the mortal frame that complete overthrow of the equipoise, which such a state almost invariably will produce. The sleep of Ildica's mind—for the reasoning soul remained asleep long after the eyes had opened again to the light of day, after her mother's death—was not the sleep which brings repose; and when at length she really woke, and gazed about her with full returning consciousness, she found an unknown scene around her.

She was stretched upon a rich couch, round which fell the hangings of a tent; and though two of her own female attendants sat at the further side, there was watching over her, a face as beautiful as she had ever beheld, but which was altogether strange to her eye. It was beautiful, as I have said, most beautiful: and though the hair was dressed in the barbarian mode, and the garments were not such as the Romans wore, yet the pure and snowy skin showed tints very different from the dingy complexion of the Huns; and, though Ildica knew not the face, yet there was something in it—something in the exquisite loveliness of those devoted deep blue eyes—that was not unfamiliar to her imagination. It was as if somebody, in former times, had sung, or told, or written to her about eyes like those. Her mind, however, wandered still; and she could not recall where, or how, such an impression had been made upon her. But she saw, as she moved, those eyes bent upon her with a

look of tender pity; and laying her hand upon that which rested on the couch beside her, she would have spoken, but her voice was so weak, that she herself started at its altered sound.

'You are better,' said Neva, for she it was who sat beside her—'you are better; I see you are better.' And though the tongue in which she spoke was but a mixture of Latin with her barbarian dialect, yet her looks spoke eloquently, and Ildica began to remember, or rather to guess, who she was.

Neva watched her gently and assiduously; and Ildica recovered health and strength; and grateful and tender did she feel towards that fair companion, who wound herself day by day so closely round her heart, that she only wondered that Theodore could have continued to love Ildica, when he had unknowingly won the heart of Neva. But though Ildica recovered rapidly, that illness had wrought a change. She remained long in deep silent fits of thought. Sometimes, when she was spoken to, her mind, intensely occupied with the dark past or the dim future, seemed to deaden her ear, and she made no reply. But what was still more strange, she spoke of her mother, she talked of her death, she inquired of her burial, without a tear moistening her eyelids. She would fain have wept; she longed to do so; but no drops, no kind relieving drops, came from the dried-up well to give her ease. Her mother and Theodore were the two great themes of her thoughts; and of her lover's coming back, she talked with joy and smiles to her own attendants; but, with kindly care, which showed how thoughtful she was for others, she avoided, as far as possible, the mention of his name to Neva.

Bleda's daughter, indeed, was now her chief companion; shared the same tent, and spent whole hours with her on each succeeding day. On Ildica, she seemed to look as on a superior being; and seated at her feet, with her arm resting on the fair Dalmatian's knee, she would gaze up into her face, trace all those beautiful lines, and mark the full lustrous eye, the swelling lip, and clear and rounded nostril, pure and defined, but soft and graceful, as if chiselled from the Parian marble. Thus she would gaze, and think in her own mind, that it was no wonder such a face and form as that, with such a spirit as shone through all that beauty, had lighted and kept alive, as pure and unextinguished as the fire of Vesta, the flame of love within the heart of one worthy of her—within a heart incapable of forgetfulness or falsehood.

Twice only did it happen that Ildica, who, however sadly her own heart might be wrung, forgot not easily the feelings of another, mentioned even the name of Theodore in the hearing of Neva. The first time the fair girl coloured and looked down; but the second she was sitting, as we have said, at Ildica's feet; and though her countenance glowed, she gazed up, and asked, 'When you saw him, did he never mention Neva's name?'

Ildica bent down her head, and kissed the fair girl's brow, saying, 'Yes, dear Neva, he did mention you.'

'And what did he say?' demanded Neva, burying her face in Ildica's robe—'what did he say?'

'He told me,' answered Ildica, pressing her hand gently, 'he told me how kind and good you had been to him; how you attended him in sickness, saved him by your care from death, and rescued him in his moment of utmost danger from the hands of those who would have slain him. He told me all, dear Neva, he told me all.'

Neva cast herself upon Ildica's bosom and wept. 'Then he told you,' she murmured through her tears, 'how I loved him, and how kindly and gently he soothed the feelings he could not return; how nobly and honestly he told me that he loved another, whom he must ever love.'

Ildica pressed her in her arms; and, raising her eyes towards heaven, she said in a low voice, 'Oh God! why should I hope to be happy, when this sweet being is wretched?'

'Nay, nay, Ildica,' cried Neva, starting back, as her ear caught those words, 'I am not wretched; I am as happy as my state will admit; I am happy in possessing the next best blessing to the great one of his love: I have his friendship, his gratitude! I am happy in having served him; I am happy in having seen the being that he loves, and in loving her myself,' and she pressed a fond kiss on Ildica's glowing cheek. 'Now, Ildica,' she continued, 'now, you know how I feel. I have seen you; I know you; I am sure you are worthy of him; and so help me all the gods, as—if it were in my power this moment to take him from you and bind him to myself—I would rather die than do it! Speak to me about him when you will, you will inflict no pain upon my heart. He is your own, your beloved, your rightful husband. Neva is contented with her lot.'

Ildica smiled sadly. 'Oh Neva,' she answered, 'it is hard to be generous in love! There is no one thing on earth I know of that I would not give to make you happy, except the affection of Theodore.'

'And now I would not have it, could it be given,' Neva replied; 'but he will soon be back again, dear Ildica. More than three weeks, out of the two months allotted for his absence, have already passed, and he will soon be here: Ildica will then be his bride; and Neva will weave the bridal flowers for her hair. Only remain within your tent, Ildica,

as long as you can; and when the army marches on again, be carried in your litter without speaking, so that Attila may think you are still ill.'

Ildica started, and gazed on Neva with surprise. 'Why should I try to deceive Attila?' she demanded: 'I have long wondered why you should all oppose my going forth to breathe the free outward air when I am ill no longer. Tell me, dear Neva, tell me what I have done to offend Attila?'

'You have done nothing to offend him,' answered Neva: 'oh no; it is not his wrath that we fear! It is, that the sight of your beauty might inflame his love. Therefore was it that Arderic, who loves your Theodore, so strongly counselled, that you should hold the semblance of sickness as long as may be.'

Ildica sank back upon the cushions that supported her, and hid her pale face in her hands, as if the doom of death had been pronounced in her ear. Terror overcame every reasoning power for some moments, and it seemed as if the fate which had been spoken of as merely possible, was certain and inevitable; and with her hands covering her face and her bosom heaving with convulsive sobs, she sat for several moments in silence; while Neva, alarmed by the state into which her words had cast her, tried, by every kindly effort, to soothe and reassure her.

At length, the fair Roman suddenly removed her hands, exclaiming, 'I had forgot myself, Neva! and had given way to terror, a feeling that should have no empire in my bosom. I do not, I will not fear this man, terrible as he is. I will hide myself from his eyes most willingly. Till Theodore comes back, I will never quit my tent: but if my evil fate should draw his looks upon me; if what you fear on my account should occur, he shall find that the daughter of a Roman can act a Roman's part. No, I will not quit this tent till Theodore returns.'

'Alas! dearest Ildica,' replied Neva, 'ere two days be over, you will be forced to leave it. Attila has ravaged all this part of the country: these plains, so fertile and so populous not a fortnight since, when we first issued forth from the mountains and encamped a two days' journey from Tridentum, are now as bare as the summit of the Alps, and not a human being save the followers of the mighty king can be seen for miles around. The white bones of the Romans who have been slain, indeed, whiten the ground; and troops of wolves have followed us from the mountains, as if they had been called by the voice of Attila himself to the feast he fails not to prepare for them; but nothing living and breathing is to be seen but ourselves and those fierce beasts; and the day after to-morrow we are appointed to march on and carry the same bloody scourge, the same fiery sword, farther into the empire.'

Ildica looked up towards the sky. 'Oh God!' she murmured, 'must such things be? Hast thou no chosen instrument, as in the days of old, to check the ravager in his course, to smite the mighty murderer of nations?' and, clasping her hands together, she fixed her eyes upon the ground, falling into a long, intense fit of gloomy meditation.

'It is strange,' she continued, when rousing herself at length from her reverie, she found Neva still sitting beside her in silence, and gazing anxiously upon her—'it is very strange! But who can tell the purpose of the Almighty? who can see into the wise counsels of the Omniscient? who can tell at what trifling stumbling block this great conqueror may fall down, or what small and insignificant means may, in the hand of God, bring all his sanguinary expeditions to an end?'

'I do believe,' said Neva, 'that when he killed my father, Bleda, I should have slain him myself if I had ever been within arm's length of him, and alone. But he is much loved by his own people, and they keep a watch for him; and now he has been kind to me, and wiped out the memory of my father's death by tenderness and affection both to my mother and myself.'

'No personal revenge,' said Ildica, thoughtfully, 'can ever justify us in shedding a human being's blood—at least I think so, Neva; but in our own defence, or in the defence of those we love, or of our country, or our faith, surely, surely God, the God of Hosts, will hallow and sanctify the deed. I think so, Neva, I believe so, but I will meditate upon it: I will inquire from the only source where we can find sure guidance.'

'Where is that?' demanded Neva.

'In the word of God,' answered Ildica, abstractedly, and again she fell into a fit of meditation, from which her fair companion did not choose to rouse her. At length, Ildica woke up of herself, and the sort of shadowy gloom which had hung upon her seemed in a degree banished by reflection; for when she looked up, a smile, faint and chastened, indeed, but still most beautiful, played upon her lip for a moment.

'I cannot but think, dear Neva,' she said, 'I cannot but hope, that we have been combating imaginary adversaries. Why should Attila think of me? why should any idle beauty, that you talk of, make him persecute one who never injured him, or wrong a man who, like Theodore, has served him well, and whom he himself professes to love?'

'You know him not, Ildica, you know him not,' replied Neva: 'his passions are fierce, and devouring as the flame; and we poor women, but the slaves of his pleasures, are no

more in his eyes than merchandize, things to be used while they please, and to be cast away when the gloss of novelty is gone. Besides, those passions, though they once had a check, have now none. He is changed, Ildica, he is changed! Within the last two years a change has come over him, which renders him no longer the same man. In former days you might rely upon his justice, if not upon his humanity; you might trust in his friendship as much as you were compelled to fear his enmity. He was sincere, though never frank; and those who knew Attila well could calculate his rising up, and his going down, and his course throughout the day, as surely as they could calculate the rising and setting of the sun himself. But he is changed, Ildica, he is changed! He has grown suspicious of his dearest friends, deceitful towards those who love him best, intemperate in all things; and while by day he revels in blood, at night he revels in wine, till drunkenness closes the day, which was begun with slaughter. The only thing that ever withholds him from gratifying his desires is shame; and if we can but keep thee from his thoughts till thy lover returns, the fear of sinking lower in the esteem of his chieftains will keep him from doing thee a wrong, from violating his word.'

'But why should I fear,' said Ildica, 'more than all the many women who, I learn, are in the camp?'

'Because thou art more beautiful than them all,' answered Neva, looking up in her face with a smile.

'Yes, but he let Eudochia go,' replied Ildica: 'he suffered her to depart, without one apparent wish to stay her; and she was much more beautiful than I am—younger, lovelier, in every way.'

'Oh no,' cried Neva, 'not half so lovely! But, besides, if I must tell thee all, I heard my cousin Ellac, the great king's son, contriving with Onegisus to inflame Attila's love for thee. He has hated Theodore ever since he set foot amongst our tribes, and he knew that he could take no more terrible revenge upon him, that he could bring down no more certain destruction upon his head, than by raising up against him Attila, as a rival in his love. I heard them lay their plot, and I know that they executed it in part. For that purpose was Theodore sent forth; for that purpose wert thou kept here; and had it not been for thy illness, and for Arderic's protection, who loves thy promised husband, thou hadst received, ere this time, terrible proofs that our fears for thee are anything but vain.'

'I do remember,' answered Ildica, 'that on that sad night before Theodore's departure, one of the barbarian leaders, a noble looking man, whom he called Arderic, and in whom he afterwards bade me trust implicitly, came to us, and warned him of some approaching danger——'

'It was I who warned Arderic,' interrupted Neva, 'because I knew that he was sincere and true, and loved thy Theodore well. All that he knew he heard from me, or from that unhappy Moor, that deformed and mutilated negro, whom thou hast seen twice follow me into thy tent. He also watched and saw much; and, with a shrewdness all his own, perceived that Attila was not unwilling to follow where his baser son would lead him.'

Ildica clasped her hands, and gazed down upon the ground. 'Oh, Neva!' she said at length, 'you must aid and protect me; for—though I know, and feel sure, that if the hour of difficulty were to come I should find courage, on the instant, to behave as befits my race and nation—though I feel sure and confident that there is no act which I should fear to do, that justice and my honour required of me—yet, Neva, yet I would fain shrink from the trial. In the contemplation of it I am but a woman; and my very soul sinks, faint and dispirited, at the very thought of what I may be called upon to suffer and to do.'

'I will aid you, I will assist you, dear Ildica,' replied Bleda's daughter; 'and there are many more in the camp who can assist you better, and who are willing to do so too: but I hear some one in the outer tent. It is the voice of Zercon, I think, speaking with your slaves. In him, too, you may trust; for he is one who will be faithful unto death. He has known me from a child, and loves me well; and since my father's death there is scarce a bitter cruelty in all the long dark catalogue of inflictions which man's savage, demon-like heart has invented, that Attila has not practised upon him. He hates Attila, therefore, and he loves all who are persecuted by his persecutor.'

'I have heard Theodore mention him,' replied Ildica. 'Did he not aid in his escape? I would fain see him again, and speak with him. All who may assist or aid me are valuable to me, dear Neva.'

Neva advanced, and drew back the curtains of the inner tent for a moment, saying, 'Dost thou seek me, Zercon? What wouldst thou with me? Come hither, and speak with me,' she added, ere the man could reply. Returning to the side of Ildica, she seated herself near her on the cushions; while the negro, Zercon, came forward, and drew the curtains of the tent behind him.

'I came to warn you,' he said, 'that there are orders gone forth, for the whole host to move forward, by dawn of day to-morrow, upon Verona itself. Be wary, be cautious, lady,' he added, fixing his eyes upon Ildica: 'all has gone well as yet: but the malice of enemies has but a slight slumber.'

'My friend,' said Ildica, in a calm but sad tone, 'I have to thank thee both for thine interest in myself, and for the services thou hast rendered to one dearer to me than myself. This sweet lady near me, thy dead master's child, tells me that thou wilt befriend me, and will be faithful unto me, even unto death.'

'That were saying little, lady,' replied the negro. 'Death, to me, is not a thing to be feared. I will serve thee, if I can, through severer trials than that; though I think that all the skill of Attila himself will hardly discover a new torture or indignity which the body of man can suffer—without being separated from the spirit—that he has not already practised upon this wretched frame.'

'I am sorry for thee, my friend, I am sorry for thee,' replied Ildica. '*Thy* sufferings should teach us to bear *our* lesser evils with more patience and fortitude.'

'Lady,' said Zercon, 'the difference between thy state and mine renders the computation of evils in our several cases very different also. Those evils, which to you are of the greatest magnitude, to me are less than the sting of a piping gnat; and it is not that we bear them differently, but that our states from infancy to this hour have rendered them really different. You have been nurtured in ease, in peace, and happiness. God made you beautiful as the day, and poured through your young veins a stream of lordly blood, drawn from a source of mighty conquerors. Philosophers and schoolmen taught you how to enjoy; and wise and good relations showed you, from your youth up, the path of virtue, and bade you prize honour as much, or more, than life. Your heart and feelings, your mind and soul, even like your tender body itself, are subject to a thousand pangs, acute and dreadful, to which mine are all insensible. I, born on a arid soil, sprung from a despised race, gifted with deformity, nurtured in hardship, companion from my infancy with famine, thirst, disease and pain, tutored but to bear, and bred up in the bitterest school of suffering—I look upon evils which to other men are great, as enjoyment—actual happiness! I may have heard the voice of philosophy, too; I may have listened to wise and learned men; but the only doctrine which has been preached to me is to suffer all things—the only lesson that I have learned through life has been endurance. The couch that feels hard to other men as a flinty rock, is a bed of down to me. Contumely and disgrace have lost their sting; my body is insensible to blows, and my heart to indignity. If I lie down to rest without the mutilating knife of tyranny lopping away my limbs, I mark the day with a white stone, and cry, "Oh happy chance!" And, though I have been too well tutored in bearing the worst ever to take refuge at the altar of death, where tyrants dare not follow, till fate shall lead me thither, yet, when the hour comes that opens that sanctuary to me, how glad will be its shelter, how heavenly its repose. Lady! oh, beautiful lady! if you can give me any service which can merit death, I will bless you as for an inestimable boon.'

'Alas! my friend, I know not what may come,' answered Ildica, with tears standing in her eyes. 'The time may not be far distant when I, too, shall look to death as the only relief.'

'I understand you, lady,' answered Zercon, 'and I know your danger; but it is one from which your own hand can righteously deliver you, if ever it becomes imminent. Zercon—the poor, the despised Zercon—can give you a gift worth more than a talent of gold in the hour of peril. Look here!' and, approaching closer to Ildica, he drew from his bosom a small dagger, the blade of which might be somewhat more than a span in length. The haft was small, and formed of ivory; and the blade, when he took it from the sheath, though dull in colour and in polish, was evidently sharp as a knife, both at the point and edge.

'This steel,' continued Zercon, 'hard as a diamond, and sharp as a graver's tool, would, if struck with a firm hand, pierce the strongest corselet that ever came from the armourer's anvil. In the hand of an infant, it would slay a giant; and I give it unto you, lady, against the hour when terror shall give place to resolution, and horror shall conquer fear.'

He spoke like a prophet; and Ildica took the dagger, and gazed upon its blade. 'Do you mean,' she asked, after a long pause, 'that I should use this thing against my own life?'

'No,' answered Zercon eagerly; 'no! I have never used it against mine; but I have felt that there was a point at which endurance was bound to stop; and that, if the time should come when opportunity favoured the blow, I was called upon by the immutable command of nature to strike in my own defence. That opportunity has never come, for it would but little serve me, when a tyrant ordered his slaves to cut away my ears or my thumbs, to take the life of one or two of his instruments. Had he been within arm's length himself, he had died as surely as I lived.'

Ildica mused with a melancholy look, still holding the dagger on her knee, while Neva, with the negro slave, gazed up in her face. The Moor seemed to read her thoughts. 'Lady,' he said, 'I hold the same faith as you do. I have held it from my youth; but I am justified. Read in that book, if thou canst read; not in the latter part alone, but

in the former also; and thou shalt find that our country's defence or our own has been held just and righteous cause for slaying the oppressor. Lady, I say no more. Conceal the weapon in your robe; and should you ever have cause to use it, let it be no hasty ill-considered blow, aimed in the terror of the moment, but with calm deliberation, in a chosen time, with the strength of virtue and of justice, and the firmness of conscious right. I have given you what, if wisely used, is better than a jewel; but I will serve you with my heart's dearest blood to avoid the necessity of ever using it; and now farewell.'

He retired as he spoke; and Ildica, taking up the dagger, held it for a moment firmly in her hand, and then placed it in her bosom. Neva gazed upon her as she did so, with a look of deep emotion; and then, sinking on her knees beside the fair Roman, threw her arms around her, and hid her face upon her lap, murmuring, 'Oh, may you never have to use it!'

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### THE POWER OF RESOLUTION.

SCARCELY was Zercon gone, when the hangings of the tent, which he had let fall behind him, were again pushed aside, and an old woman, of some barbarian tribe, frightful in features, and fantastically dressed, entered and stood before Ildica. Neva started up; and when she beheld this personage, she turned very pale.

'What wouldst thou?' demanded Ildica, in her own language; but the woman did not seem to understand her, and continued to gaze upon her from head to foot.

'What wouldst thou?' repeated Neva, in the Hunnish tongue, in reply to which the old crone burst into a loud and scornful laugh, adding, 'I came to see what I have seen!' and, turning as she spoke, she left the tent without waiting for farther inquiries.

'Who is that, dear Neva?' demanded Ildica. 'She is rude and strange in her demeanour.'

'Alas! alas!' replied Neva; 'I fear her coming bodes no good. She is skilled in healing, and dwells amongst the wives of Attila; and I doubt not that she has been sent to see if thou art as ill as we have reported.'

At these words, Ildica herself turned pale, and gazed anxiously upon the countenance of Neva. She had no time, however, to inquire farther; for scarcely had the woman left the tent, when there was a cry of 'Attila! Attila! The king! the king!' and the domestic attendants, who had followed the fair Roman girl and her mother through all their fortunes, ran in with looks of apprehension from the outer tent, and surrounded their beloved mistress.

The moment after, the cry of 'Attila! Attila!' was repeated, the hangings were again drawn back, and the dark monarch of the Huns advanced at once into the tent. There was a mortal paleness upon Ildica's countenance; but, from the moment that the cry of 'Attila! Attila!' had sounded on her ear, till the moment that he came into her presence, the eyes of those who surrounded her saw an expression of high and noble resolution gathering upon that fair, lofty forehead, as the electric clouds upon a summer's day may be seen rolling round some mountain peak, till that which in the morning light was all clear and fair, becomes ere noon awful in the proud majesty of the coming storm.

All rose and retired a step as Attila entered, except Ildica; but she, with queen-like calmness, kept her place: and it was wonderful to all eyes to behold that sweet and gentle girl, full of tenderness and soft affections, changed in a moment, by the power of a great mind and mighty resolution, into a proud and lordly being, fit to cope with the great conqueror of one half of the earth. Thereshe sat immovable, gazing with the unquailing light of her lustrous eyes upon the dark monarch as he advanced towards her; and even Attila himself—though the cause was surprise and admiration only—paused for a single instant midway in his approach, and scarcely could believe his eyes, that this was the same creature whom he had last beheld dissolved in tears beside her departing brother. Her beauty, however, was as radiant, though it shone through another air; and, again advancing, he seated himself beside her calmly on the cushions, saying, 'They have deceived me: they told me you were ill!'

'I have been ill, oh king!' replied Ildica, in a voice not a tone of which faltered, even in the slightest degree—'I have been ill, very nearly unto death.'

'Illness seldom wears so lovely a form,' replied Attila, in a softened voice. 'Attila trusts that thou art better, fair maiden; else thy beauty belies thy state.'

'I am better, oh king,' answered Ildica; 'and I trust that a few days more of repose may restore me completely unto health.'

'Were it not better for thee,' said Attila, 'to seek the open air, and draw in the pure breath of the summer day, than sitting here in the close atmosphere of a tent to waste the hours of sunshine?'

'The covering of this tent, oh king,' replied Ildica boldly, 'shuts out from me more things than the pure air; and if, in going forth, I should gain advantage from the sweet breath of heaven visiting my lips, the sights that I should behold would carry tenfold poison to

my heart by the sure channel of the eye—at least, if all be true that I have heard.'

'What hast thou heard?' demanded Attila quickly, rolling his eye over those that surrounded them—'What hast thou heard, sweet Ildica?

'I have heard,' she replied, unwilling to call down the anger of that terrible monarch upon anyone else, however sure she might be of encountering it ultimately herself—'I have heard but the usual tale of warfare: I have heard of populous cities taken, and made desolate; of blood drowning out the fire on the dear domestic hearth; of thousands, and tens of thousands, slaughtered, and their bodies lying unburied in the fields, or nailed, if they resisted, to the trees of their own fruitful gardens. I have heard of the whole land swept of its produce, its arts obliterated, its monuments destroyed, its husbandmen slain, even its women and children put to the sword—and that land my country!'

She paused; but Attila made no reply, and sat listening as if he expected her to go on. 'Pardon me, oh king,' continued Ildica—'pardon me, if I am bold to say thus much; but as it was grief which brought me nearly unto death at first—deep, bitter grief! I am told that any grief whatsoever, added anew, may complete what the other left undone, and bring me at once unto the grave.'

'A mother's death,' replied Attila, without any sign of anger at the bold and proud demeanour of the fair Roman girl—'a mother's death, so sudden and unexpected, might well shake the strength and fortitude of a daughter; but as to other things, I see not why she should let her mind rest upon them.'

'Let me not boast, oh king!' replied Ildica, resolved to leave no word unspoken, which might guard her against all she feared—'Let me not boast, but yet I may say, my fortitude is never shaken. It was the bodily strength gave way, and not the resolution of the heart. Neither was it a mother's loss alone: that was the last of many sorrows. Before it, went the parting with my brother and the sister of my heart; and before that again, the still bitterer parting with my promised husband, with him I love, and always have loved, better than anything on earth.'

Attila's brow grew dark, and he fixed his eyes bitterly upon the ground. Ildica marked the expression, however much he strove to control it, but she proceeded all the more eagerly; and had he been a tiger ready for the spring, still she would have gone on. 'Yes, oh king! that, though the first, was the bitterest stroke of all—for who shall tell how I love him, how deeply, how sincerely, how beyond all other things I love him. Without him, life to me is a dark blank, and when you forbade our union, and sent him from me to a distant land, you struck the blow that undermined my health; you filled high the cup that my mother's death caused afterwards to overflow.'

She paused again, and Attila looked up, and replied, 'Thy voice is sweet and musical, lovely girl, but thy words are harsh, and somewhat grating to mine ear. Attila seeks not to make thee unhappy; but be not rash, and change the tenderness which he feels for thee and thine into a less gentle temper. I would not force thee to behold sights which may be painful to a woman's eye; but to-morrow early thou, as well as the rest, must set out upon our onward march.'

'Must we then go on,' said Ildica: 'I had hoped, as thou hast encamped here long, some cause might induce thee to turn thy fiery sword another way, and not let the edge fall heavy upon Rome.'

'We must upon our march!' replied Attila, 'we must upon our march! The country around us is exhausted of its stores. We have dried up the land of its wine and oil, like the summer's sun shining on a scanty brook. All is consumed; and where the foot of Attila's horse has trod grows no grass afterwards. I paused here,' he added, with a grim smile, 'because my son sent me word, that a pitiful city of the Venetian province resisted the army of Attila, one of those stony piles, in which you Romans love to dwell, called Aquileia.'

'What! Aquileia, the beautiful, the proud,' exclaimed Ildica, 'the provincial Rome?'

'The same,' replied Attila. 'It dared to shut its gates against those I sent to possess it; and when I reached them myself I found that it had made its resistance good. It was different from the usual Roman towns. There were more than women and boys within. The catapult and balista had been plied in vain. The walls held out; and as I rode around, the soldiers on the towers, in their fancied security, laughed loud, and mocked the arms of Attila. But there was a certain stork—wiser, by the gods' own teaching, than the fools within—who saw the horse of Attila pause before the spot where she had built her nest upon the ramparts, and auguring destruction to the towers on which he looked, she took her young ones on her back, and flew away for ever. Over the fragments of that nest, strewed upon the ruins of that wall, passed the horse of Attila ere nightfall; and now let after ages look for Aquileia, and find some scattered stones spread over a desolate plain. The brothers of those who defended it shall never gather their bones into their family sepulchre; for the flames of that city have confounded all, and nothing but dust is left. Thus perish all who resist the will of Attila,' he added, and fixed his eyes full on Ildica.

'They did but die,' replied the Roman girl, and she gave him back his glance as proudly as it was sent. The light of irrepressible admiration rose in that mighty monarch's eyes, and for several minutes he remained gazing upon her in silence; but there mingled with that stedfast look an expression which, in spite of every effort, called the quick and modest blood into the cheek of Ildica.

'Those whom Attila loves,' said the king, 'are as sure of benefits, as those who resist him of punishments; and surely the regard of one, before whom the proudest monarchs of the earth bow down their heads, is a prize worth having to those whose hearts are noble and their spirit high. The great, the generous, and the lofty-minded, should ever love each other; and I say to thee, fair maiden, that thy noble and thy daring mind has this day commanded the esteem of Attila more fully than even thy radiant, thine unequalled beauty has called forth the admiration of his eyes.'

'Esteem, oh Attila!' replied Ildica, in a calm solemn tone; 'must ever create esteem; for it is founded on virtue, and ever springs from it. Those we esteem we would never debase, and dare not injure; and Ildica rests tranquilly upon the esteem of Attila for protecion against all men—even should it be against himself.'

Attila cast down his eyes, and for a few moments remained in thought; then turning to the attendants round, he said in a tone that admitted no reply, 'Leave us!'

One by one, those who stood near quitted the tent, Neva following more slowly, and with downcast eyes. Ildica lifted her heart to heaven, and prayed internally for strength and wisdom, for she felt that the hour of trial might be coming near. The hangings of the tent fell; but scarcely had they fallen, when there came sudden voices sounding eagerly without, and in a moment after Onegisus entered the presence of Attila.

'Let me die, if I have offended, oh mighty king!' he said, in breathless haste; 'but I have tidings that admit no delay.'

'Speak them!' said Attila.

'Ætius, oh king, has passed the mountains, replied the chief: 'he brings with him the legions of Gaul. Valentinian has quitted Ravenna, and gathers an army under the walls of Rome. The fleets of Marcian are upon the Adriatic.'

Attila listened without a change of countenance. 'Thy news from the East is false,' he said: 'Marcian stirs not. Valentinian is a fly in a spider's web. Is it sure that Ætius has passed the mountains?'

'The tribe of Ilgours, who were in the country of the Burgundians,' replied Onegisus, 'followed his march, and have sent on messengers to warn the king.'

'Then it is true,' said Attila, rising, 'and we must scourge him back into Gaul. Attila marches for Milan. I leave you, my friend, to tread upon Verona and Padua, and to sweep the plains behind me of all adversaries. Leave nothing dangerous behind, and follow with all speed. Where are Arderic and Valamir? They must accompany me this night!' and with a slow and deliberate step he quitted the tent, giving no sign of emotion of any kind, unless his leaving Ildica without a word, or even a look, might be construed into a proof of how much the tidings he had just heard affected him at heart.

Ildica lifted her eyes to heaven, and clasped her hands, exclaiming, 'Oh God, thou dost not desert me in my utmost need! On thee will I rely!' and with a heart relieved, she burst into a long but happy flood of tears.

'To Milan!' she thought—'to Milan!' That is far off. Ætius, too, is before him. Ere I shall see his face again, Theodore will have returned, and I shall be delivered!' and again she wept. Her attendants flocked around her; and some, seeing her state without knowing why, mingled their tears with hers.

'Weep not, my friends,' she said at length—'weep not! I weep for joy! Leave me alone for a while; and give me the ivory scrinium with the silver clasps. There is a book therein, I would fain read to tranquillise my mind.'

The attendants obeyed; and bringing her the casket which she had mentioned, set it down beside her and retired. Ildica opened the scrinium, and, from amongst a number of rolls of parchment and papyrus, selected a manuscript in vellum, gathered together into the form of two or three small volumes, and pored eagerly upon the pages, seeming to find there matter for deep meditation and solemn interest. Now, her eye ran rapidly over the lines, and her hand turned the pages without pause; and then again she would suddenly stop, and looking up, as if for light and direction, would think for several minutes over what she had just read, as if the sense were doubtful, or the precept difficult of application. But the book was one which, in every age since first its words were traced upon that page of light, has caused, and well might cause, the mind of man to lose itself in lofty musings. It was the book which to the eye of the inspired patriarch of old was shown, in the vision of those heavenly steps by which the angels of God came down to earth, and ascended back again on high. It was the book which leads the soul step by step from the thoughts of earth, and the common and familiar things which the mind of man can grasp, up to those wide and sublime regions, where, standing at the footstool of the Almighty throne, we still gaze up on high, and thought

loses itself in the boundless space of mercy, power, and wisdom. It was that book, down each gradation of which angels and prophets came to visit earth, and lead back into heaven the just, the humble, and the true.

There, as she read, the eye might see the history of that sacred Being during his short stay on earth, whose life was mercy and purity; whose words were wisdom and holiness; whose birth, and whose death were equally miraculous and beneficent, an example, a teacher, a guide, a sacrifice, an atonement. There, too, as her eye ran back over the long record, which marks the preservation of the revealed knowledge of our God, holy, and true, and wise, throughout ages and amongst nations, corrupt, perverse, unfaithful, the eye might trace the simple, touching story of the early fathers of mankind, and see displayed in the candid words of divine truth their thoughts, their errors, and their virtues, without a shade of palliation or excuse. There lay revealed the mighty trial of Abraham's triumphant faith; there, the sweet history of Joseph and his little brother; there, the tale of Ruth, and of the widow and her son, and the mighty faults and virtues of Israel's psalmist king; there, his son's instructive wisdom and monitory fall; there, all those affecting scenes, which, in their grand simplicity, defy the brightest eloquence of every people and of every time, to move the heart of man as they do.

But it was not on such scenes that the eye of Ildica principally rested. She sought for matters more assimilating with her fate and fortunes at the time. She read of the battles of the chosen people of God, their wars, their victories, their reverses. She paused, and thought upon the history of Sisera and Jael; but oh, how her heart thrilled when she read the tale of the tyrant warrior, from whom a woman's hand delivered the people of the Lord! She read! she trembled! she gasped for breath! She laid down the book, and wept aloud!

Oh, let us leave the secret feelings of her heart to commune with themselves undisclosed! for who can say what those feelings were, how deep, how sad, how terrible? Who can tell them all perfectly, who can display the struggle, and the mingling, and the strife, wherein a thousand opposing thoughts, and hopes, and fears, bright sympathies, noble aspirations, lofty purposes, and mighty inspirations, together with woman's shrinking modesty, intense love, and tender nature, contended like hostile nations bent on mutual destruction within the narrow battle-field of that fair, beautiful bosom? Who can tell them all? and if not all, should we trifle with a part? Oh, no, no! we have said enough!

## CHAPTER XL.

### THE WEAK AGAINST THE STRONG.

THROUGH the most fertile plain that Europe can display, amidst the olive and the fig, the loaded vine and the ripening corn, with on one side a vast and interminable view over lands laughing in the richest gifts of nature, and on the other, mounting up into the sky, the gigantic mountains which separate that bright land from all the rest of the earth, passed on a multitude of those savage warriors, who were destined to change the rich plains of Lombardy, from the garden of the world to the most desolate spot of this quarter of the globe.

But, alas! not alone did those fierce warriors take their way, unaccompanied by any of the children of the soil. On the contrary, closely following their march, appeared a body, which contained within itself sad samples of all the vice, the weakness, the baseness of the land. There was the skilful engineer, whose warlike, but not perilous art provided the means of destruction for other men's hands to use: there was the theoretic strategist, whose pen prepared the plans of battles that he could not fight; there, the sculptor and the limner ready ever to transmit unto posterity the features of those whose actions commanded admiration, though not applause: there, the thousand fawning slaves ready to forget all ties, so long as they could cover baser bonds by the golden ties of interest. Besides all these, were the captives, not chained, indeed, but dragged along by fetters as powerful as rings of iron, selected and preserved from slaughtered myriads, for a fate worse than death itself, on account of those qualities which adorn and beautify the blessed state of freedom — beauty, skill, strength, and activity: these were the sad gifts that purchased slavery.

In the midst of these—herself a captive, though surrounded by her own slaves, now all in bondage to another—was borne along the fair Dalmatian girl, whose fate has occupied so much of our attention. Her way was cleared by parties of the Huns appointed expressly for that purpose; and honours, too queen-like, awaited her wherever she paused. In many a place she found garlands strewed in her way, and tutored rejoicings greeted her at every resting place. But oh! the coldest silence, the most icy indifference, would have conveyed more warmth to her heart, than those demonstrations of a distinction which she feared.

Seldom, very seldom, did she raise her eyes; but, poring earnestly on a book before her, seemed buried in contemplations, from which no external objects could awaken her. Twice only during the second day's journey from

Verona did she look up, and then her attention was called forcibly towards too terrible a sight, by the wild ejaculations of the attendants who surrounded her. On either side of the road appeared, when she did look up, a range of trees which had been planted to afford a pleasant shelter to the weary wayfarer from the burning rays of the summer's sun. But now, fixed upon those trees, were immense crosses of wood, on each of which, extended by nails in the hands and feet, was seen the dead body of a human being contorted with the agonies of a painful death. Nor had one nation alone, nor one country, furnished the victims for that awful sacrifice; for there were seen the dark-visaged Hun, the fair-haired Frank, the large-limbed Goth, the strong-featured Roman—all, in short, against whom any charge of deceit, or infidelity, towards Attila and the Hunnish nation could be brought, were arrayed in fearful assemblage to terrify the passer-by.

Ildica gazed on them, when her attention was forced towards them; and then clasping her hands, she looked up on high; while her lips murmured woman's prayer for patience under all the sad scenes which she was destined to act in and behold. Then again, casting down her eyes, she strove to avoid, as far as possible, such fearful sights, hoping that brighter days, and more joyful objects, might come, and blot them out for ever from the tablets of memory, or soften the harsh lines so that they should be no longer painful. But still, as they marched onward, fresh scenes of desolation and horror were forced upon her sight, and whether she would or not, the indignant heart swelled up, and a voice within her bosom exclaimed, 'Oh for a warrior's soul, and a warrior's might! Oh for an ancient Roman's undaunted energy, to stem this dark and ruinous torrent in its course, to drive back the destroyer of my native land, to snatch the bloody scourge out of the hand of fate, and hurl it for ever into the gulf of death!'

At length a large and magnificent city appeared before her; and Ildica prepared her eyes to witness the same utter destruction which she had beheld in every other town. Her astonishment was great, however, on entering Mediolanum,* to behold the inhabitants pursuing their ordinary occupations; the shops opened, and their wares exposed, in the very presence of those ruthless barbarians, who had come to spoil and desolate the land. It is true the great body of Attila's army was encamped without its walls, and that but a few thousand of the Huns were permitted to enter the city; but still, with its gates in their possession, and its walls covered by their troops, Milan was at the mercy of the Hunnish multitude, and nothing but the awful name of Attila saved it from destruction.

The troops of Onegisus entered not the gates of the city; but the litter of Ildica was borne forward through the principal streets, and at length stopped before a magnificent pile of building, which was in fact the royal palace of Milan. Those who accompanied her waited for directions from some one within; and, after a brief pause, the litter was again carried on into the interior of the palace. At the foot of the great staircase it was set down, and Ildica with her attendants was bade to follow on foot. From room to room, from hall to hall, from gallery to gallery, she was led onward by several of the barbarian chiefs, beholding as she advanced, with wonder not unmixed with pleasure, that amidst all the splendour which that building displayed, amidst all the monuments of art which it contained, no act of violence had been perpetrated by the hand of the barbarians, but that there every object remained untouched, or at least uninjured. At one spot, indeed, she beheld a painter busily employed in labouring with the brush upon the walls, but he was a Roman; and on looking nearer she perceived that he was making a complete change in one of the pictures, which represented some barbarian kings kneeling at the feet of a Roman emperor.

'What doest thou, my friend?' she asked.

'I am working at the command of the mighty Attila,' replied the painter, 'in order to change this picture so as to suit the changes of the time. When I have done, two Roman emperors will be seen kneeling at the feet of a Scythian king.'

Ildica walked on without reply, feeling bitterly in her heart the truth of the sad lesson which Attila thus taught.

At the further extremity of the building she found the apartments assigned to her; and in a moment or two after she had entered them, and when the Huns who conducted her had withdrawn, Neva, whom she had not beheld for many days, approached, and took her fondly in her arms. The girl's countenance was sad, however, and while she gazed upon Ildica, the tears rose in her eyes.

'Shall I say welcome?' she asked—'shall I say welcome, when I fear that much grief awaits you? Shall I say welcome to a place, where you must hear many things that will grieve you?'

At these words the dull heavy weight fell again upon Ildica's heart, and the struggle recommenced, the painful struggle, of strong and high-minded resolution against woman's natural fears and apprehensions. 'Speak,' she replied, 'speak, dear Neva. Tell me what new cause of sorrow and of terror has arisen. Tell me what step has been taken in

* Milan.

the warfare that fate seems resolved to wage against my happiness on earth.'

'Alas;' replied Neva, 'alas! that my lip should tell it; but it is only right to warn thee of what you might hear too soon from other lips, and might hear unprepared. Attila speaks of thee often: Attila speaks of thee with love: Attila speaks of thee as of one destined to be his; and thou knowest, Ildica, that his will is like the will of fate.'

'Not so, Neva; not so,' replied Ildica. 'There is a will above his!' But while she thus expressed her trust, the tears rolled from her eyes in despite of every effort, and she wept bitterly. 'There is a will above his,' she said, 'holier, more merciful, and mightier far! In it will I trust, Neva, in it will I trust! But what do I do weeping?' she added—'what do I do weeping, when I have to think, to resolve, and act?—what do I do weeping, when lo he comes, and I have need of vigour, not of tears; of determination, not of terror? Hear you not his step, hear you not his step? He is coming! he is coming! Hear you not his step?' and as she spoke, she grasped the arm of the fair girl tight in her hand, and gazed towards the door with a look of wild and painful anticipation, which, had it not been too well justified by her circumstances, might well have passed for the vivid, but wandering glance of insanity.

'It is not his foot you hear,' replied Neva, fondly linking herself to Ildica, and striving to assuage the fears which she had herself occasioned. 'That is not his step—I know it well, Ildica! I have known it, and trembled at it, from my infancy. As the beasts of the field have an intimation of the earthquake, and fly trembling from the walls over which the impending ruin is suspended—as the light summer insect, to whom the falling drop of a spring shower is a deadly ocean, finds some warning to seek shelter, beneath the foliage, against the coming destruction—as the birds cease their song, and the cattle seek the fold before the approaching storm—so unto me has been given an augury of danger and of terror, in the world-shaking step of that awful king. I have heard it in the sunshine of summer, and the sunshine has become clouded: I have heard it in the dead of the night, and night has assumed the horror of the grave.—But hark! Whoever it is that speaks with the attendants without—that voice is not Attila's, nor was the step.'

As she spoke, the curtain was withdrawn, and there appeared not the form of the Scythian king, but that of Arderic, chief of the Gepidæ. His countenance, as we have already said, was naturally frank and open; and, unlike that of Attila, it displayed, as in a highly polished mirror, every emotion of his heart, except when, by some great effort, he drew an unwonted veil over the picture of his thoughts, which there found their ordinary expression. His face was now clouded; and advancing towards Neva, he spoke a few words to her in the Hunnish dialect; and then, turning towards Ildica, addressed her, though with considerable difficulty, in the Latin tongue.

Agitated, terrified, and confused, it was with difficulty Ildica gathered his meaning. She found, however, that what he said consisted of warnings of approaching danger, like those which Neva had already given, and of caution, and advice, as to how she should avoid or mitigate it. Though for the time Ildica's mind could scarcely grasp those counsels, yet they returned beneficially to her in the hour of need. She heard him tell her that delay to her was more valuable than beaten gold, and remind her that in her case any sort of duplicity was justifiable to foil a tyrant, who knew no scruples, and joined deceit with power. But all that Ildica could reply, under her overpowering sense of the fearful struggle she saw approaching, was, 'Can I not fly? Oh, can I not fly?'

'For fifty miles around on every side,' replied Arderic, 'the troops of the Huns are spread over the country; and for more than fifty miles beyond those, scattered parties from a thousand different nations, but all attached to Attila by vows, by love, or by fear, roam through the country, and keep, as it were, an outer watch on his camp. The eagle may escape from the net woven to catch a sparrow; the lion may rend into a thousand pieces the toils which were set to catch the stag or the elk; but thou canst no more escape from the midst of the host of Attila than a small fly can disentangle itself from the meshes of the spider.'

Ildica wept bitterly, nor was it with the kind of tears which bring relief. They were not tears for the past—the dark irretrievable past, for the beloved and the dead, for the hours wasted, or the pleasures passed away—they were not tears, in short, for any of those things which may be mourned with mourning sweet and profitable—but they were the deep, bitter, fruitless tears of apprehension wrung forth by the agony of a fearful but unavoidable fate. She wept bitterly, she wept wildly, she noted not Arderic; she heeded not the voice of Neva. Hopes and consolations they offered her in vain. Advice and direction seemed to fall unheeded on her ear: she appeared not to notice their presence, nor be conscious of their sympathy. Indeed, so totally was she absorbed in the overpowering sorrows of her own heart, and the fearful contemplation of the destiny before her, that she knew not when they left her, nor wakened from the vision of

her woe, till another voice demanded, in a tone that made her start wildly from her seat, 'Why weepest thou, maiden? why weepest thou so bitterly?'—and Attila stood before her.

She gazed upon him with a wandering and anxious look, while one might count ten, but then the triumph of the powerful mind began again. The moment of terror and apprehension was over—the moment of resolution and of action was come. Womanly weakness had had its hour, and was passed. The Roman heart was re-awakened by the voice that called her to the trial. The sight of Attila, like the fierce sun shining on the dewy grass after a storm, dried up the tears in her eyes; and after that brief pause she replied, 'I weep, oh king! because as a woman I am weak; because I am apprehensive of the future; because I am uncertain of the present; because I grieve for the past. Little cause is there to ask any one living why he weeps. Thou wouldst do more wisely wert thou to ask any one in this world why he smiles.'

'Maiden,' replied Attila, 'dost thou think that such vague words can deceive me? Thinkest thou that so thin a veil can hide the features of thy mind? Thou weepest for thy lover! thou thinkest that he is either dead or faithless, because he has not come so soon as he promised!'

'Thou art mistaken, oh Attila!' replied Ildica; 'I neither think him dead—for God protects the good, the virtuous, and the noble—nor do I think him faithless; for to judge so harshly of him would be to wrong the God who formed his heart, and made it upright, true, and constant. I may have fears and apprehensions, but they are not of him, nor of his truth. What they are, matters not to any one; for though I may be carried captive after a mighty conqueror's army, the freedom of my thoughts he cannot touch; and I am still at liberty in heart and soul, above his reach, and far beyond his power.'

Her words, however bold, seemed to give no offence to Attila; but, on the contrary, as she spoke, a brighter and a warmer fire glowed up in his countenance, and taking her unwilling but unresisting hand, he led her back to the seat from which she had risen, saying, 'Thou art bold as well as beautiful, and well fit to be the bride of some great warrior, whose soul is capable of prizing such as thine.'

'May such be my fate!' replied Ildica. 'Theodore, to whom all my thoughts and feelings are given, is worthy of much more than this weak hand. Hast thou heard news of his return, oh king? and dost thou come to make me happy with the tidings?'

Attila's brow grew dark for a moment; but the angry cloud soon passed away, and the light of other passions returned to his countenance. 'No, Ildica, no!' he said, 'I come not to tell you of his return, for no news of his coming has yet reached the camp, though the time fixed by his own lips as the utmost period of his absence has well nigh expired. No, Ildica, no! I come to tell thee of a brighter and a loftier fate which may be thine, if thy mind be capable, as I am sure it is, of higher aspirations and more noble hopes.'

'I seek no loftier fate, oh king!' cried Ildica, shrinking from his eager gaze, and striving to delay the utterance of words by Attila, which, with woman's keen insight into the heart of man, she knew would bind him to pursue his purpose by the bond of pride, stronger, far stronger, than even passion itself—'I seek no loftier fate, I entertain no higher aspirations! To be the wife of him whom my heart has loved from infancy to womanhood—to wed him who has loved me through every change of fate, through peril and danger, through absence and temptation—to wed him who has so loved me, and whom I so love, is to my mind the brightest fate, the loftiest destiny, that woman could obtain.'

'But if he be dead?' said Attila, fixing his dark eyes full upon her.

'Then,' replied Ildica, seeing the danger of the slightest hesitation in her answer to such a suggestion, 'then will I either die also, or, vowing myself to silent prayer, quit for ever an idle and a sorrowful world, and hide myself with some of those lone sisterhoods who spend their days in solitude.'

'Not so,' answered Attila, drawing closer to her; 'thou shouldst have a better destiny; thou shouldst be the bride of Attila—his chosen, his best beloved bride; honoured and revered above all others; queen of his heart; mistress of his actions; sovereign of all the nations that bow to his command.'

Ildica sprang from his eager arm, and cast herself upon her knees before him. The terrible words were spoken! There was no escape left but in determination strong as his own! She could no longer avoid the theme most dreaded; and her task was to meet it boldly and at once!

'Hear me, oh king!' she cried earnestly—'Hear me! I am small, and thou art great! Hear me, and save me even from thyself! I love another deeply, devotedly, truly; but even were that other dead, I could never love thee as thou wouldst wish to be loved—nay, as thou deservest to be loved. Mighty warrior! great and magnanimous king! unequalled conqueror! wilt thou debase thyself to contend with a woman? Wilt thou degrade thyself to violate the sanctity of thy word, to wrong the innocent and the unoffending, to betray those who trusted thee, to destroy him who loved thee? Wilt thou risk being defeated by the strong and resolute heart of a girl like

me? Monarch! I am not in thy power, but in God's! To God I will appeal against thee; and sooner than become thy bride, will give my spirit back to Him who lent it. Think not that thou canst frustrate my purpose, and debar me of my will. A camp has always weapons whereby my own life can be reached; no tent, but has its cord; no banquet, but has its knife. Not a tower of this city but affords me the means of defying the mighty power of Attila; and the flinty bed beneath yon window would, to me, seem a couch of down compared with thy bridal bed, oh king! But thou wilt spare me! thou wilt spare me! I know thy better thoughts and nobler nature. Thou dost but try me. Thou wilt still be just, and wise, and esteemed of all men! If Theodore be dead, tell me so; and I will vow myself to God—I can bear such tidings with calm grief; but never, never can I love Attila as Attila should be loved! Oh, let me reverence and admire him still! Force me not to see in him the pagan king—the destroyer of my country—the enemy of my faith—the slayer of my promised husband—the betrayer of his trust—the falsifier of his word—the tyrant of a woman whom he had vowed to protect!'

So rapidly, so earnestly, so vehemently did she speak, and at the same time so lovely did she look in the attitude of eager supplication, that Attila had neither time nor inclination to interrupt her; and, though admiration and tenderness were crossed by jealousy, at the words of love which she bestowed on Theodore, and by anger, at the daring terms she feared not to apply to himself, he remained silent for a moment after she had done, gazing on that splendid countenance, and that beautiful form, awakened, as both face and figure were, into a thousand fresh graces, by the imploring earnestness of her address.

'Take care,' he exclaimed at length, 'take care. Remember, love may be turned into hate; and the hate of Attila is a thing to be feared.'

'Not near so much by me as is his love,' replied Ildica. 'Oh king! thou canst but slay me, and I fear not death. No torture that the cruellest tyrant ever yet invented is equal to the torture of the mind; and were I to wed Attila, could my mind ever be free from agony?'

'Why? why?' demanded Attila fiercely. 'Is it that this form is hateful to thee? Is it that this hand, which a thousand conquered kings have felt proud to kiss, is abhorrent in thine eyes?'

'No, no! oh no!' cried Ildica, taking the hand that he had partly extended, and pressing her lips upon it—'No, mighty king, far from it! It is, that I love another with a love that death itself can never change. It is, that our faith is different, all our thoughts unlike, that thou art the avowed enemy of my country—yet all that were nothing, compared with my love for another. Were he dead to-morrow, still would he live in my heart, as vividly, as strongly, as if I saw him every day. This is no vain dream, no idle fancy! I have known it, and proved it, during long, long years of absence; and I should but gaze upon thee, and think upon him—I should live in the past, and hate the present for his sake! —Oh, mighty Attila! be generous, be noble! and command, by thine actions, the only kind of love that Ildica can yield thee. Heaven is my witness, that far from feeling towards thee with the cold abhorrence which thou seemest to think I experience—far from striving to hate thee even as the enemy of my country, and to regard thee with detestation, as many of my nation do—ever since that day when first in the plains of Margus thou savedst the life of him I loved, and didst free me and mine from terrible captivity, I have ever loved thee with deep veneration. I have thought of thee as at once mighty and generous, a conqueror, but a noble one, the enemy of my country, indeed, but a great, a wonderful, a just, a lofty-minded man. Thus have I thought of thee, and thus has my beloved Theodore ever taught me to think, by word and by letter, by the tale of thy great deeds, and by his knowledge of thy noble nature.'

Attila was evidently moved; and, folding his arms upon his breast, he turned his eyes from Ildica, as if from some impulse of shame, and fixed them on the ground. The fair girl, however, saw that she had produced some effect, and she proceeded eagerly in that strain, which had been thus far successful.

'Think, oh Attila,' she exclaimed, 'think what has been the conduct towards thee, of him whom I so dearly love. I know not half of what he has done, for he boasts not of good actions; but sure I am that you have ever found him faithful, zealous, and true; and thou canst in thine own mind trace, as in a picture, all that he has done for thee and thine. Have I not heard, here in the camp, that he saved the life of thy youngest child, the beautiful youth whom they call Ernac? Have I not heard that in some battle in Gaul more than once he risked his life to defend that of Attila? Has he ever failed thee in the hour of need? Has he ever spoken to thee, or of thee, one unjust word? Has he ever betrayed thee in small things, or in great? Has he ever been untrue to thee, oh king? And wouldst thou now betray him; wouldst thou make *his* life miserable, who always sought thy welfare? Wouldst thou take that life which was risked to save thine own? Wouldst thou take his bride, the chief object of his existence, from him, who, from the

jaws of destruction rescued thy beloved child?'

'No, no, no!' cried Attila, taking both the hands that she held out towards him in the act of adjuration—'no, no; I will not wrong him! Thou hast conquered! Whatever I may feel, however strong and burning be the passion that thou hast kindled in my heart, I will not take his bride from him who saved my son. Rise, maiden, rise! and set your heart at rest! If the son of Paulinus return to claim thee for his bride, his bride thou shalt be, and I will send ye together far from me, that the memory of these feelings may never be re-awakened by the sight of thy beauty. A week hence is the utmost term that he allowed himself to return; I will add thereunto another week, ere I see thee again, that I may not increase the fire that burns even now within my heart. If he be not then returned, Attila will cause diligent search and inquiry to be made, that his fate may be clearly ascertained. Attila will do justice to the son of Paulinus; but if he be dead, as in these times of trouble and of pestilence he well may be, Ildica will do justice unto Attila.'

Her heart sunk at his last words; but she had gained so much already, that she dare not risk all again by a reply. All she answered then was, 'God defend us both!' and covering her fair face with her hands, she gave way to the many mingled emotions that struggled in her breast—present relief—future apprehension—hope, never dying, consoling hope—her dark inseparable companion, fear—the agitation of a great struggle achieved; and the overpowering sense of success beyond her anticipations—she could not restrain them all—she gave way, and wept.

Attila gazed upon her for several minutes in silence, and then exclaimed, 'Thou art too lovely! But be comforted,' he added, 'thou mayest be happy yet!'

Thus saying, he turned, and left her to indulge her tears in peace.

## CHAPTER XLI.

### THE POWER OF MIND.

'On to Rome! on to Rome! On to the eternal city! On to the ancient capital of empires! On to the throne of mighty kings of old! Attila has conquered Ætius! The two mighty men have met; and the weaker has given way. Attila triumphs over Ætius! On to Rome! on to Rome! The world is open and prostrate before the sword of Attila. On to Rome! on to Rome! On to spoil, and to victory, and to triumph!'

Such were the cries that ran through the host of the Huns, as they marched on from Milan, towards the devoted city of the Cæsars. And mighty, and terrible, indeed, was that innumerable multitude, as, composed of a thousand nations, it flowed on like an overwhelming deluge upon its way. Those who stood and gazed upon its wide extended front, as, rushing on irresistible, it swept the fair plains of Lombardy, might well want language and figures to express the awful advance of the barbarian world.

The dark thunder cloud, sweeping at once over the clear blue sky, and shutting out sunshine and daylight beneath its ominous veil, is too slow in its course, too unsubstantial in its form, to afford an image of that living inundation. The avalanche that sweeps down the side of the Alps, overwhelming flocks, and herds, and cities in its way, is but petty when compared with the immense masses of that fierce and furious multitude. The long wave of the agitated sea, when cast by the breath of the tempest upon the echoing shore, would give but a faint idea of that rushing multitude of armed men.

No! Neither bounded to a narrow space, nor gradually and slowly carried forward, nor checked in its course and retiring to return again, did the multitudes of Attila advance. But spread out from sea to sea; rushing onward, with the swiftness of the wind; irresistible, overpowering, vast, like the dark tide of lava when it rushes down the channelled sides of Etna, came the barbarian myriads, finding brightness and beauty before them, and leaving darkness and desolation behind.

Through every road, over every field, into every city, across every river, they passed. Like the sword of the destroying Angel in the dwellings of the Egyptians, nothing seemed to stop them, nothing to impede their progress, even for an hour. Terror and lamentation went through all the land; and the voice of weeping was heard, from the banks of the Athesis to the straits of Scylla; Ravenna, defensible as it was, was abandoned in a day; and Rome itself wailed in trembling for the approach of a new, a fiercer conqueror than Alaric.

At length the tent of Attila was pitched by the side of a grand lake, where from its bosom flows the stream by whose banks the sweetest of the Roman poets sung. No longer simple as when he first entered Greece, appeared the camp of the barbarian king; no longer was seen the ring of wagons only, and the multitude sleeping in the fresh air of night: but there, tents of every form and every hue diversified the plain which stretches along, from the base of the gigantic mountains that enclose the stormy waves of the Benacus, to the soft green fields of the fair Mantuan land, where the 'silver-grey cattle,' of which Virgil sung, still bathe in the placid waters of his native Mincius.

Far and wide, as the eye could see, extended that vast encampment; and the air, for many a mile, rang with the neighing of horses and the clang of arms. At the very junction of the lake and the river, on a high sloping ground, whence the eye of the monarch could behold both the far plains covered by his innumerable host, and the waters of the lake, with all its grand and beautiful shores, was pitched the tent of Attila, together with those of the persons immediately attached to the monarch himself: and splendid was the sight, when, after a night of repose, the cloudless sun of Italy rose up and poured its flood of splendour over one of the loveliest scenes of earth, living and animated with the figures of those wild but splendidly-attired horsemen.

At the entrance of the tent, beside which his horse was held prepared, stood Attila, gazing over that thrilling sight; and, strange as it may seem, there was something in the picturesque beauty of the scene, in the poetical aspect of the whole, the mighty host, the mighty mountains, the beaming sunrise, and the glowing lake, that found, even within the breast of the fierce conqueror, a sympathising appreciation of what is bright and beautiful in nature.

He stood and gazed, and felt his soul calmed and soothed.

'We will stay here to-day,' he said. 'The land is rich and plentiful: the people will be happy in this place of oil and wine. We will stay here to-day; and to-morrow, onwards towards Rome!—But what is that?' he continued, after gazing for some minutes longer. 'What is that, winding slowly along, in the distant country, following the road by the side of the river? It looks like a long train of horsemen approaching slowly, and it can hardly be any of our own tribes returning at this early hour. What can that be?'

No eyes, however, but his own, were keen enough to distinguish, in the far distance, the object to which he pointed; and he added, 'Let some one be sent forth to see, and let no man be injured, who comes to us in the garb of peace. This day there shall be no blood shed, unless our enemies seek it themselves. Here we will taste repose and tranquillity.'

Several hours had elapsed; the myriads of the Huns were all awake and stirring; thousands of wild horsemen were galloping over the plain, exercising their horses, or practising with the javelin or the spear: and others on foot were moving about amongst the tents, in all the bustling activity of the morning's duties, when the train which Attila had seen approaching through the distant country, entered the Hunnish camp, and were led forward towards the tent of the monarch. Some of his own messengers, who had gone out to meet the strangers, hurried on before to inform him that envoys, from the Emperor Valentinian, were even then coming near his presence. But the monarch, who still, though changed in many things, retained in some degree his contempt for pomp and show, merely ordered the hangings of his tent to be drawn up, and seating himself in the entrance, awaited the arrival of the imperial ambassadors.

At their head appeared an old man, riding on a mule; and though the Huns gathered round in crowds, to see an equipage to which they were not accustomed, yet there was something so venerable and commanding in that old man's air, that even the rude barbarian soldiers forbore to press upon him, and merely gazed; while—with his look now raised to heaven, as if in momentary supplication, now cast down upon the ground, as if in deep thought—he rode slowly on, through the midst of that fierce and blood-accustomed host, as if fear and wonder were utter strangers to his bosom.

After him followed a number of other men, clothed with princely splendour, and mounted on fiery chargers; but ever and anon their eyes were cast around upon the sea of dark faces that surrounded them, and an expression perhaps not of fear, but certainly of anxiety, might be seen upon their countenances. At first, the Huns demanded amongst themselves why the old man upon the mule rode first, before the warriors; but when they compared his aspect with that of those who followed, they saw that he was in his proper place.

Last came a number of domestic servants and attendants, followed by slaves beating on a long train of beasts of burden; and in the slaves might be seen—as with hard hearts and unsparing hands they struck unmercifully the dumb suffering creatures but a grade below themselves—in them might be seen, though springing from a lower motive, the same fearless indifference to the presence of the strange multitude, as he who led them displayed, from a sense of faith and duty.

At the foot of the little hill on which stood the tent of Attila, the multitude of the Huns paused, and followed the strangers no longer; and there, too, the envoys of the emperor were directed to dismount. The command was instantly obeyed; and leaving the servants and the train of baggage in the hands of some of the officers of the camp, all the rest began to ascend the hill, towards the presence of the monarch, who, seated in the door of his tent, with but a few of his chief leaders around him, waited above, examining the persons and the air of each of the strangers as he approached.

With a slow step, dignified, calm, and collected, that old man who had led the Romans, climbed the hill, slightly bowed by age, but rather stiffened than enfeebled. He was tall

and largely proportioned; and his snowy hair, which, like that of the barbarians, felt not the steel, escaping from a cap of a peculiar form that he wore upon his head, flowed down in wavy curls upon his shoulders. His eye, which he but once raised towards the tent of Attila as he ascended, was calm and mild, but full of sleeping fire; and his step, though slow, was planted firmly on the ground, giving to his whole demeanour an air of resolution and of power, which was not without its effect on those who watched his advance up the mountain.

Attila himself, as he sat in the stern silence natural to him, and beheld the calm and equable approach of the messenger of Valentinian towards his presence, might wonder at that unshaken firmness, which so few displayed under similar circumstances. He moved not a muscle, however, but gazed sternly upon the envoy, till at length, when within ten paces of his seat, the great Pontiff of Rome—for he it was—paused in his advance, and said to those who followed, in a full steady voice, 'Let Avienus and Trigetius come with me! The rest wait here!' and then, proceeding on his way, he drew near to Attila.

'Who art thou?' demanded the barbarian king, in that full deep tone which was powerful and impressive, without being rude or abrupt. 'Who art thou, that comest so boldly before Attila?'

'I am Leo, the servant of God!' replied the pope, bending his head, as he pronounced the almighty name.

'Of what God?' demanded Attila.

'There is but one God,' replied Saint Leo; 'there is but one God, holy, just, and true; Lord of lords, and King of kings! The lowest of his servants am I!'

'Thou meanest the God of the Christians?' said Attila.

The pope bent his head in reply, and the monarch proceeded. 'It is well,' he said, 'it is well! Now tell me what thou wouldst have with Attila? Why comest thou to me hither, when, but a few short days, and I had come to thee?'

'It is to prevent thy coming that I seek thee,' replied the bishop—'it is to prevent thy coming, and to stay the stream of blood that is poured out before thy steps. It is to save from desolation the beautiful land that thou treadest like a wine-presser beneath thy feet, crushing all that is good and excellent, and leaving nothing but the worthless refuse. It is to adjure thee, by the name of God Most High, to spare his servants, and to turn thee from a land which His holy faith hath sanctified, and the blood of His saints made sacred. I do adjure thee by His name to pause in the course which He has hitherto made victorious, lest He take thy strength from thee, and destroy thee as thou hast destroyed others. Monarch!' he continued, seeing a cloud gathering on the brow of Attila—'monarch! I menace thee not with any human arm. None has ever been able to resist thee successfully; none has ever had power to oppose thee long: but know, oh king! that thou, like all others, art but an instrument in the hands of a mightier monarch. Thou art called the SCOURGE OF GOD, and verily He has used thee for the purposes of his vengeance. With thee hath He wrought destruction, and inflicted punishment upon the faithless and the unrighteous. In His hand thou hast been as the pestilence or the thunderbolt. Thou hast swept away nations. Thou hast smitten down monarchs. Thou hast trodden the palace and the cottage alike, with the sword of the destroying angel in thy hand; but now, in the name of the same God, who sent thee forth to conquer and to slay, I bid thee pause and turn back upon thy way, lest He take thy strength from thee, and reduce thy glory into shame. Remember, oh king! remember, that one, who, like thee, was mighty; who, like thee, was fierce; who, like thee, was unconquerable by man, trod these same plains but a few brief years ago; and, as a vulture, swept the land with the wing of desolation. Remember, how Alaric, the mighty and the strong, marched on at the head of his innumerable hosts, and, like thee, found none to stay him. Remember, how he heard the warning to pause, and turn back, ere he set his foot within the eternal city. Remember, how he neglected the warning; how he despised the words; how he conquered Rome, and died. In all things, but in this, was he like unto thee! But in this was he unlike, for I know—and feel—and see—as if it were before me in a vision, that thou shalt listen to the word of the servant of God, and sheathe the sword, and turn back upon thy way. Monarch! I tell thee, and my words shall prove true, that none henceforth for ever shall march against Rome, and place their camp round about it, and subdue it unto their hand, without meeting some terrible reverse; without finding death, or downfall, or dishonour follow, as surely as night follows day. Some shall come against it and take it, and die as soon as they quit it. Some shall assail it, and fall even in the hour of victory. Some shall subdue it, and after years of glory, shall see the brightness of their fame tarnished with shame, defeat, and overthrow, with long and weary inactivity, and lingering death. But thou shalt listen to the voice of warning; thou shalt fear the name of God, the word of God's servant, and shall turn thee back, and escape the peril of disobedience.'

Bold and striking as his words was the action which accompanied them; dignified, nay,

sublime, was the expression of his countenance. The dark eye filled with the fire of genius, the fine features beaming with the divine light of enthusiasm, the lips trembling with the eloquence of the heart, the arms outstretched in passionate expostulation, the broad chest heaving under its flowing robes with the energy of lofty thoughts, while the full, powerful, melodious voice, clear, rounded, unhesitating, poured forth the stream of words—all, all formed a splendid whole, such as none there present had ever seen before ; and the barbarian monarch himself, and his fierce chiefs, gave ready way to the delusions of imagination, and believed that they beheld an immediate messenger from heaven. Even when he had done, and remained with his firm unquailing gaze fixed upon the face of Attila, with eyes that sunk not to encounter the look at which nations trembled, all those around, though the impression produced by his oratory perhaps faded, still looked upon him as a superior being, still waited for the answer of their own monarch, with anxiety, perhaps with apprehension.

But Attila, though struck and admiring, forgot not himself in wonder—that passion of the weak. From the beginning to the end, while Saint Leo spoke, the mighty monarch fixed upon his countenance the same stern immovable gaze, under the influence of which every inferior mind gave way, every ordinary heart lost courage. Twice his swarthy brow slightly contracted as the prelate spoke those bold words, which Attila's ear was seldom wont to hear ; but his face was moved in no other feature : and he made not an effort to stop the orator in the course of his eager and energetic speech. When he had concluded, Attila continued to gaze upon him thoughtfully and intently ; but, apparently, neither scornfully nor displeased.

At length, he said, 'Thou hast spoken like a god ; but know, that not the gods themselves shall turn back Attila from his course, unless he have the justice he has demanded. Thou art reverenced, oh Leo ! as one of mighty powers—as one inspired, perhaps, by the God whom thou servest, with eloquence above that of mortals ; and willingly will Attila hear thee discourse on the matters of thy high calling, as to whether there be more gods than one ; as to the nature of the soul of man ; the powers that govern him throughout life, and the fate that awaits him beyond the grave. On such matters shalt thou be listened to willingly, nay more, with reverent ears, as becomes those who hear the words of one touched by the spirit of a god. We will attend to thine exhortations in favour of Rome, to thy warnings, in regard to those who conquer it, even to thy menaces against the life of Attila himself. But Attila turns not aside for words ! He whom the embattled line of enemies cannot impede, is not to be overawed, even by an holy man as thou art. He fears not the sword ; he avoids not the spear. The twanging of the bowstring makes not his eye-lids fall ; the shout of the enemy is pleasant on his ear. His battle-horse shall bear him onward, whithersoever his fate directs ; and if the destiny of Attila lie within the gates of Rome, to Rome herself and to her capital will Attila go to seek it. Death comes but once, and chooses his own time. The sentence is written on high ; and so help me Mars and my good sword, as I would not reverse it, were it to be fulfilled to-morrow. My grave is already dug by the hand of destiny, wherever that grave is to be. And what matters it to Attila whether he lie beneath the grey olives of Italy, or the green birch trees by the Danube ?'

He paused a moment, gazing thoughtfully upon the prelate ; and a slight smile might have been seen upon the lip of Arderic, to hear his mighty leader adopting, as he went on in the career of victory, so much of his own doctrine of fatalism.

In a moment, Attila proceeded. 'Thus much I have spoken,' he said. 'Looking upon thee as a messenger from the gods, and filled with the spirit of the knowledge of the future, willingly on these points will I discourse with thee at large, seeing that in all the lands I have visited I have never met any one like thee. But if thou comest as an envoy from Valentinian—lord of these lands, but unto me a slave, on whose neck I set my foot—thou must speak of other things if thou wouldst turn me from the path which lies before me. Thou must speak of offerings, to atone for the past ; of tribute, to show his subjection for the future : of the complete satisfaction of all my just demands. Thou must show Attila, that the glory and honour of himself and of his people are to be maintained and increased by following the course that thou wouldst have us pursue, ere thou canst hope to stay these myriads on their forward way, or turn the sword of Attila in another direction. Do this. Leave my justice and my honour no plea against him, and I will raise up a wall between you and the desolation of my presence. Your fields shall flourish in the sunshine. Your rivers shall flow with the accustomed wine ; the land teem with oil and bread ; and ye shall rear your children up in peace, safe from the destroying sword, till the name of Attila be no more than the whisper of the wind through the gorges of some distant mountain.'

A bright and heavenly smile beamed up over the noble features of Saint Leo, and he replied at once, without pause or hesitation, 'Monarch, I will turn thee back !'

There was something so dignified, so majestic, so sublime in the air, the tone, and the manner with which the pontiff pronounced those few words, that Attila himself was visibly struck and surprised. 'How so?' demanded he: 'how so—how wilt thou turn me back? Wilt thou bring down fire from heaven?'

'I will do more!' replied Saint Leo—'I will give thee such justice that even the heart of a conqueror can demand no more! Thou hast said that thou wilt turn back, if I will satisfy thine honour and thy justice. I have offers for thee, which, as a minister of God's word, I declare to be as full and complete satisfaction as ambition itself could demand. Wilt thou hear them now, oh king?'

'No,' replied Attila, 'I will not. Thou art weary with travel, and hast many years upon thy brow. Attila has kept thee too long already without offering thee bread and rest. This night shalt thou repose in tranquillity and peace. The wine shall flow for thee, and the feast shall be prepared——'

Saint Leo waved his hand, 'Fasting and prayer,' he cried, 'fasting and prayer shall be my companions. Prostrate in the dust, lifting my heart unto the throne of God, humbly calling upon the name of my Saviour, beseeching the Spirit of truth to guide me aright! With fasting and with prayer will I entreat the almighty Disposer of all hearts to soften thine, and change its stern nature into mercy. Be it as thou hast said, oh king! I will seek repose. Those who came with me have need of it; and in the meantime my words have fallen upon an ear that will not lose them lightly. When may I hold farther commune with thee?'

'Two hours ere noon to-morrow,' replied Attila. 'Till then, seek refreshment and repose, and Attila will take counsel as to the very smallest offering which he can receive as a propitiation to suspend his sword. In the meantime, I give thee unto the care of these my officers. Thou fearest not to rest within the camp of the Huns?'

'I am in the hand of God!' replied Saint Leo, throwing wide his arms, and looking up to heaven—'I am in the hand of God! Why should I fear?'

## CHAPTER XLII.

### THE VISION AND ITS INTERPRETATION.

There were frequent messengers came and went to and from the tent of Attila, and there was movement and agitation in the camp. Round the monarch sat his tributary kings; and various were the different shades of expression which passed over the countenances of those fierce chiefs, as they listened to the words of their leader, and heard all that had befallen since, on the preceding day, the great Pontiff of Rome had appeared to stay them in their advance.

'It was but a vision of the night!' said Attila—'It was but some idle dream, and yet it came before me full, tangible, complete. There was no wandering of thought to other things, no confusion of fancies, no breaking off and beginning again; but it was all clear and definite, accurate and minute; and yet it was but a vision, an idle dream, which Attila will heed no more than he would a fanciful cloud wrought into strange forms by the wind that bears it.'

'Heed no visions, oh Attila!' said Arderic—'The only sure vision will be the walls of Rome.'

'And yet, oh mighty king!' joined in Onegisus, 'one at least here present would fain hear the substance of the dream that disturbed thy slumbers. It has been held by wise men and by priests long versed in sacred things, that dreams come forth from the gods, and are one means of making their will known to men. I at least would fain hear what vision it was that broke the sleep of Attila.'

'And I also! and I! and I!' said many voices round, as soon as the demand was made; and leaning his broad brow upon his hand, with his eyes fixed thoughtfully upon the table at which he sat, Attila not unwillingly proceeded to speak as they required.

'It seemed to me as if I had slept some hours,' he said, 'and that I was awakened by a noise, when looking up, I saw all things around me as I had seen them when I closed mine eyes. There were the hangings of the tent, there the clothing I had put off to rest, there burned the feeble lamp, there lay the strong sword. Two javelins crossed hung upon my right, and a spear lay near me on the ground. I saw it all as distinctly as ere I closed my eyes that night, when lo! the hangings of the tent were moved, raised up; and, without sound or motion of their limbs, the figures of two men approached my couch. A cloud of light environed them around, hiding in its blaze all things behind it. The lamp grew dim as if it had not been lighted, and in this cloud, borne on to where I lay, the strangers came, clothed in strange robes, simple and unadorned, with hair and beards of snowy whiteness, and the marks of extreme age upon the face of each. One, however, was older than the other, and of coarser features, though there was a fire and eagerness in his large eye, which spoke a mighty and energetic spirit, prompt in its emotions and its acts. The younger seemed more calm, and of a loftier aspect, and on his countenance were seen the traces of high thoughts, perhaps, too, of some sufferings endured with fortitute, but felt with keen perception. A smile, bland and beautiful, sat on his lips, and there was in his glance

that quick yet thoughtful movement which I have seen in men, deep arguers on right and wrong, subtle in their eloquence, and powerful to untie the tangled intricacy of questions remote and difficult. Around them in that cloud of light there shone a greater light, as if it issued forth from them and from their garments; and though they seemed of flesh as we are, yet there was a difference that scarcely can be told, but which rendered their bodies more glorious and pure to the eye than ours. I would fain have stretched out my hand to seize my sword, but I lay as if chained down by adamantine bonds. I would fain have spoken, to demand who dared in such a sort to disturb the sleep of Attila, but my tongue refused its office, and my lips moved without a sound. Approaching, as I have said, without any visible motion of their limbs, but borne forward by some unseen power, they came near, and stood by the side of my couch: there, gazing upon me for a moment, their eyes seemed filled with pity or with sorrow, and at length the younger said, "Attila! Attila! thou hast fought, and thou hast conquered, and unwittingly, but not unwillingly, thou hast done the will of God! Now turn thee back upon thy way, for thou shalt smite this land no more. Turn thee back upon thy way, and hesitate not, for we are sent to bid thee sheathe the sword, lest it fall upon thine own head. Turn thee back, turn thee back, and that speedily, as thou wouldst live and conquer still!" And with that the light grew faint, the figures seemed to dissolve, the cloud passed away; and I was lying in my own tent, with the lamp burning feebly by my side. It was but a vision, an idle dream and it is passed! Attila heeds it not. It was but a vision, an unreal vision!'

'It was a strange one, though, oh mighty king!' said Onegisus; 'and I would fain ask yon holy man, who came hither yesterday, if he can give the interpretation thereof, and tell who were these that appeared unto thee.'

'First let those who slept in the outer tent,' said Arderic, 'be closely questioned, if any one passed by them in the night.'

'I have questioned them already,' said Attila—'I have done more: I rose instantly; for my limbs and my mind seemed freed as if from a heavy weight; and drawing back the curtains that divide the tent, I found that no one living could have entered, without treading on the sleeping bodies of those of my warriors who lay without. It was but a vision, an idle vision of the night!'

'I put no faith in visions,' said Arderic: 'they never visit me. If I dream, 'tis of some empty thing taking fanciful shapes without regularity or continuance, forgotten as soon as passed. I put no faith in visions.'

Attila's brow contracted slightly, but he made no reply; and Valamir, his Gothic tributary, who had hitherto remained thoughtful and silent, now raised his eyes. 'Thy vision is a strange one, oh king,' he said, 'and worthy of some consideration. More, perhaps, than thou thyself art willing to bestow upon it. Yet would I not ask the interpretation of this eloquent man, whose voice was heard so powerfully yesterday; for he of course will see therein a confirmation of his own warnings. There is another in the camp, who may be better trusted. Dost thou remember, oh mighty Attila, a holy hermit, who dwelt in the mountains, two or three days' journey from Margus, and who——'

'But he is dead,' interrupted Attila; 'he has been dead two years.'

'True,' replied Valamir; 'but near him there dwelt another hermit, less shrewd, and wise, perhaps, but, even more than he was, touched with the fire of the gods. Wild, rash, and fearless, he speaks whatever the spirit prompts, and in such a man's interpretation one may trust with confidence. Amongst the train who followed hither this high priest of Rome was the very man, and well acquainted with the manners and the languages of us people of the North. He was wandering yesterday evening through the camp; and I myself saw him preaching boldly strange doctrines of other gods, to a large crowd of Huns and Gepidæ. Let him be sent for, and to him let the vision be told. On his interpretation we can better rely.'

All voices applauded the proposal, and instantly was it executed. Messengers went forth to find the enthusiast Mizetus, and in a few minutes he stood before Attila and his counsellors. He was silent as the grave, while the vision was being told to him; but then—stretching forth his hands, and turning his eyes full upon the countenance of Attila, though not with a fixed and steadfast gaze, but with a wild and rolling glance—he exclaimed, 'Is it not simple as the light of day? Is it not open as the summer's sky? Is it not clear as the waters from the rock? What need of interpretation? What need of any one to explain? There is but one God, oh Attila, though thou and these, as slaves of Satan, worship stone, and wood, and iron. That God has been merciful to thee, oh king, and has sent unto thee the apostles of his Son, Peter the prince of the apostles, and Paul the chosen by the voice of God! To thee, from another world, he has sent those, through the midst of thy sleeping guards, who when they lived in this world passed through the hands of gaolers, cast from them the fetters of iron, and walked free through the prison doors of the Roman governor. To thee has he sent them in mercy, to turn thee back from the

way of destruction. Listen to their words, tread back thy steps, sheathe the sword, open thy heart to the word of God, and thou shalt be safe. If thou doest not this, if thou goest on in rapine and injustice, shedding the blood of the faithful, and smiting the people of Christ, lo! I tell thee, when thine errand is accomplished, and the judgments of God wrought out, thou shalt die by some despised death; thine armies shall melt away like snow, the bodies of thy warriors slain shall rot under the summer's sky, and a pestilence shall go forth from their bones to root out those whom the sword has spared. Woe unto you! woe unto your mighty men, for the sword of the Lord is out against you, and he shall scatter you to the uttermost parts of the earth, and shall grind your mouths in the dirt of the earth ye have trodden so proudly, and shall cast ye forth as dead dogs, to be an abomination to the passer by!'

More than one sword leaped from its sheath at those bold words, but the deep thunder-like voice of Attila stayed them from smiting the rash enthusiast. 'Harm him not, harm him not!' cried the monarch. 'By the soul of Attila he dies who strikes him! Did we not bid him speak? Did we not call for his words? and shall we slay him because they are such as please us not?—Stranger,' he continued, 'thou hast spoken rashly amongst rash men, nevertheless thou art safe, and mayest depart!'

Mizetus turned to quit the tent, but ere he went, he raised his hand, and said in a solemn tone, 'I grieve for thee, oh Attila; for thy fate is near!'

'Let it come!' replied Attila—and the enthusiast departed.

'We have spent too much time on this thing,' continued the monarch, 'let us now turn our thoughts to more substantial warnings. Arderic, my friend, as thou hast said, this vision was indeed but an empty dream, and but matter for a moment's speculation; but I have tidings for thee, which thou knowest not of, for thy Gepidæ lie high up upon the hill. There are those here, however, who know that between sunset last night, and sunrise this morning, the sword of the pestilence smote amongst the warriors, who lie by the side of the river, nearly ten thousand men!'

Arderic started up, and gazed fixedly on the countenance of Attila.

'It is true!' said the monarch; 'but this is not all, my friend. A fleet from Constantinople has wafted a new host to our noble enemy Ætius; nor is that all either,' he added, raising his voice; 'the armies of Marcian have crossed the Danube, and cut to pieces three of our tribes upon the Dacian frontier. Now, friends and counsellors, you know the whole. Tell me what shall be the course of Attila. Shall I go on, and lay Rome in ashes? Shall I pause here, and accept the tribute this priest is prepared to offer? Willing am I to do the first, willing would I be to do it, were I as sure that death would follow within a day, as I am that there is a sun behind the clouds that now stretch over the sky.'

'Hear what he has to offer, oh mighty king,' said Arderic; 'then, if it be enough to satisfy the honour of Attila, and save the glory of his warriors, accept the conditions. Let us retire from this pestilential land, and then——'

'What then?' demanded Attila, after waiting for a moment to let the chief conclude his sentence.

'Nay, I know not,' replied Arderic. 'Then—let us do whatsoever Attila will.'

A brief smile passed like lightning across the countenance of the king, 'And then,' he said, 'and then——To Constantinople! and we shall see who is to live or die; who is to be a monarch, who a slave! The sword of a thousand battles against the broken spear of a weak Roman! Methinks the chances are unequal. Kings of great nations! Friends of Attila! There is no need to ask what are the terms this Roman bishop brings. They are known to me already—revealed to me in no vision, Arderic, but told to my messenger at my demand. He offers a gift ten times in value all that the East and West have ever given, an annual tribute, double that which we received from Theodosius. A future compensation for the dowry of Honoria, and the restitution of all captives and fugitives from the Hunnish nation! Is this sufficient?'

'It is! it is!' replied the chiefs; and a messenger was instantly despatched to summon Saint Leo to the tent of the barbarian monarch.

With the same calm dignity as before, the prelate presented himself before the council of Attila, and in his whole demeanour there was that grand, but simple and unassuming majesty, which commanded the reverence, the respect—almost the love—of men of a different nation, creed, language, manners, habits, thoughts. Attila himself rose at his approach, and with an air not less in dignity, took him by the hand and placed him by his side.

The pontiff felt that he had touched the heart of the barbarian, and he was more moved at having done so, than had the utmost ire of that mighty king—a king who feared no chastisement, acknowledged no laws but his own sense of right, bowed to no superior on earth or in heaven—than had his ire threatened the worst tortures that could be inflicted. Through the reverence with which he had inspired the barbarian monarch he saw, as through a long avenue, a number of

sympathies, noble feelings, and generous sentiments, akin to those which dwelt in his own heart; while hope stood half-way between, and beckoned to the kindred bands, to unite for mighty purposes and grand endeavours. A moment's reflection, however, a moment's glance of the mental eye over the sad but solemn and oracular book of experience, showed him the falsehood of the syren's tale, and made him grieve that the brightest feelings of the human heart, mutually perceived and understood, and which, could they meet and co-operate, would work out the blessing and happiness of thousands, should ever thus be stopped by obstacles insignificant, and totally unseen by those who attempt to pass them till all their efforts for unanimity and concord are overthrown.

Calmly and clearly, in answer to the questions of the king, he recapitulated the splendid, the degrading offers of Valentinian; and he added, 'This, oh king, am I commanded to propose: this am I authorised to promise. The gift is already in thy camp; the tribute shall soon follow; and—as a mediator between thee and them who suffer, standing pure and impartial under the eye of God, who is of no nation and of no country, and respecteth no man for a name—I declare that thou hast now offered unto thee, more than thou canst claim aright; more than equity could pronounce against them; more than justice can award unto thy claim. But when unto all this is added the great triumph of clemency, the mighty privilege of showing mercy, the triumphant glory of sparing those thou couldst destroy; so help me heaven, as I do believe that there is offered unto thee more than even thy conquering sword could win, more than thy highest ambition could desire, more than thy vastest efforts could attain! Is it more glorious to slaughter than to save? Is it more mighty to destroy than to spare? Is it a greater sign of power to cast down than to raise up? He that saves from the slayer is greater than the slayer: he that shields from the destroyer is victorious over the destroyer; and he that raises up does a deed which shall last long after he who casts down is forgotten! Spare then, oh Attila, spare the nations! and if in sparing them thou gainest a triumph over thyself, thou doest that which the noblest of thine enemies has never been able to do, and raisest to thyself the crowning trophy of thy fame, under which shall be written by the hand of history, "*None but Attila gained the victory over Attila!*"'

Even had he not spoken, the terms he offered would have been accepted; but had they been less than they were, they would have been accepted under the influence of his voice. The gorgeous presents were brought up, and displayed before the tent of Attila. The gold and the silver was poured out; the jewels and the cloth of gold were displayed to the eyes of the admiring chiefs, who crowded round. But Attila himself looked not on them; his eyes were either thoughtfully lifted to the sky, in that direction wherein lay Rome, or else bent down in deep reflection upon the ground, while traces of emotion, slight indeed in themselves, but still from their unusualness indicative of strong feelings within, might be traced upon his countenance.

When all the gifts were displayed, he turned abruptly to Saint Leo, saying, 'Messenger of a mighty God, Attila turns upon his steps. Take what thou wilt of these baubles, either as an offering to thy Deity, or as a gift unto thyself!'

'God forbid!' replied the pontiff: 'the God I serve—the only God!—dwells not in temples made with hands, and requires no offerings from the sons of men, but a pure and contrite spirit, a repentant and an humble heart. As for me, I take no part in the spoils of my brethren, and I leave them to him, to whom they were sent, and of whose forbearance they are the price and recompense.'

'Thou art the first priest,' cried Attila—'thou art the first priest of any god that ever yet I heard of who refused gold and jewels, when they were offered to him freely!'

'Thou hast known but few Christian priests, my son,' replied Saint Leo, mildly. 'The priests thou hast known were the servants of those whom we call Devils, Mammon, or Plutus, the demon of covetousness; Belial, Lucifer, or Apollo, the god of pride; Moloch or Mars, the demon of bloodshed. The priests of all these and many others, for their several purposes, seek wealth and splendour; but the servants of God, the only true God, seek His glory, and know their own unworthiness. Oh Attila, I leave thee! I came unto thee, knowing that thou hadst a mighty name, and that none upon this earth had been found to conquer thee; that kings, and princes, and warriors of great renown, bowed down trembling before thee, and shrunk from the very glance of thine eye; and yet I feared thee not. I go from thee now with my reverence not lessened, but with deep sorrow at my heart, to find nobler qualities in thy nature; qualities which, guiding and directing the inferior ones of courage and military skill, have made thee what thou art; and yet to see that those qualities, like diamonds in some undiscovered mine, lie wasting all their brightness, because they are not known and estimated. The knowledge of one true God, the faith in one redeeming Saviour, are all that is wanting to raise Attila high above living men! I leave those in thy camp who may show thee a light thou hast never yet seen. Listen unto them, Oh Attila! listen unto them and be saved!

Yet! yet! I trust the mild spirit of the Almighty God will touch thy heart, and turn it into humility and righteousness. Then, mounting from the humbleness of faith, Attila will rise to a pitch of glory no earthly arms can ever win, and stand upon a point where mortal monarch never placed himself without the Spirit of the Lord to raise him up on high.'

'Thou speakest words I do not comprehend,' said Attila, turning away.

'God make them clear to thee in his own good time!' replied the bishop, and slowly descended the hill.

## CHAPTER XLIII.

### THE SOMETHING WORSE THAN DEATH.

We must now turn again to Ildica! In agony of heart, she sat within her tent with the spirit bowed down and nearly broken, and the bodily frame bent and shaken under the load of grief. Before her stood the messenger of Attila, who bore her the sad tidings of the loss of him she loved. Beside her stood the fair daughter of the dead king, Bleda, and the wild enthusiast Mizetus.

Tearless, all tearless was the bright eye of the Dalmatian girl, although through the clear white skin of the temples might be seen the blue veins swelling up like cords with the rushing up of the agonised blood.

The enthusiast kept silence, and gazed on her with a look of deep grief; but from the dark-blue eyes of Neva rolled profuse the large heavy tears, and in the sorrow of her own heart she asked many a question of the messenger regarding all the particulars of the fate of one still too dearly beloved.

'Art thou sure,' she demanded, 'that the winds and tempests did the work of death? Art thou sure that the commands of Attila, more cruel, more unsparing, than the fierce elements, had not their share?'

'I know nothing,' replied the messenger, 'but that which I was commanded to say. The ship perished, and almost all on board were drowned.'

'Almost all!' cried Ildica, starting up and gazing eagerly in the man's face—'Almost all! Then there is yet hope!'

'Alas, no!' replied the messenger. 'All who reached the land were slain upon the shore by some wandering bands of warriors!'

'Even so! even so!' cried Ildica; 'sent on purpose to destroy him at his landing! Oh, fatal beauty! Thou hast caused the death of him I loved most on earth;' and she cast herself down upon the couch and hid her face in her robe; while from time to time a sharp shudder might be seen to pass over that fair form, as if the anguish of the spirit were destroying its earthly tabernacle.

'Art thou sure that he was in the ship?' demanded Neva, still clinging to a hope.

'Quite sure!' replied the messenger; 'presents from the Emperor Marcian—goods marked with the youth's name—his very clothing itself, have been brought into the presence of Attila.'

'Of his murderer!' said Neva; 'of his murderer!'

The man, who was a Roman fugitive, made no reply; and, after a brief pause, withdrew from the tent.

'What means she, maiden?' demanded Mizetus, turning to Neva; 'what means she, when she says that her beauty has caused the death of him she loved?'

'Dost thou not comprehend?' cried the girl, gazing at him through her tears; 'dost thou not know, that Attila himself seeks her love? Canst thou not guess that he took the life of him who was his happier rival?'

'Is it even so?' cried Mizetus; 'alas, unhappy maiden! for what art thou reserved?' and, after gazing at her for a moment or two in melancholy thought, he quitted the tent, and turned his steps towards the royal pavilion of Attila himself.

Where was that pavilion now? No longer on the shores of the wild Benacus, no longer looking over the fertile plains of Italy, but on the slope of the Carpathian mountains, amidst the rude but magnificent scenery of the hill country. There were congregated the myriads of the North; there was pitched the camp of a thousand nations, covering every rise, and sweeping down into every valley. But as Mizetus wandered on amongst them, all were in movement; the Huns and the Gepidæ, and the Goths, the Heruli and the Alani, were pouring forth slowly on foot, and mounting with a low rushing murmur towards the tent of Attila. As they went, one spoke unto the other, and the voice of complaint made itself heard.

'Why call for us now?' cried one.

'We might even now have been revelling in Rome!' said another.

'Has Attila lost his daring?' asked a third.

'Is he to be led by the smooth words of a grey-beard in long robes?' demanded a fourth.

And thus they went murmuring on, till gathering together upon the hill-side, they covered a vast extent, above which again—with a space of many cubits between it and them, kept clear by the officers of the king—towered the pavilion of their mighty chief. During some time the noise of coming feet was heard; but at length all the men of that vast host seemed congregated there: the curtains of the tent were drawn, and Attila stood before them. He gave one slow glance around, and the loudest murmurer in the host cast down his eyes before that dark counte-

nance, as if he feared that the monarch might see the rebellion in his heart, and smite him on the spot. All was hushed as if in death; and then the voice of Attila was heard, spreading round and round, till scarce a man in all that multitude could fail to catch his words.

'Ye have dared to murmur at the will of Attila!' he said. 'Ye have dared to think that ye knew better than he did! Ye have dared to call his wisdom weakness, because he led you away from Rome, whose treasures were exhausted to buy your absence; and while ye thus complained, ye knew not whither he was leading you! It is time that ye should hear, in order that shame may glow like a burning spot upon your brows. I lead ye to Constantinople, to the city of the Cæsars, to the plunder of the richest capital in the universe!—I swear,' he continued, drawing his sword, as if moved by some sudden impulse, and holding it up on high before his eyes, as he addressed to it his vow—'I swear that I will not leave one blade of grass in Thrace, nor one city standing, nor the wall of one fortress not cast down, nor one living enemy to oppose my path! This sword will I not sheathe till I sheathe it in the capital of the East. The feet of my horse shall never pause for more than one rising and setting of the sun, till I tighten the bridle in his mouth, on the shores of the Thracian Bosphorus. I go forth to smite and to destroy, and I will make the land like unto one which has never been inhabited. I will cast down everything in my way; and the vulture which follows me, to eat the dead bodies of mine enemies, shall not have to raise his wings when he snuffs their carcasses from afar. Ye have heard the will of Attila! Get ye gone! Sharpen your arrows, but restrain your tongues!'

'Boaster,' cried a shrill voice from the crowd, speaking in the Greek tongue, 'thou shalt die even in thy pride! But the crowd had already begun to move, and the noise of their innumerable feet drowned the sounds of that warning voice. The multitude separated slowly; Attila re-entered his tent; and Mizetus, with his hands clasped, and his eyes, full of wandering fire, bent down upon the ground, strayed away with a slow irregular pace, along the course of a little rivulet that streamed down from the higher hills. He muttered to himself as he went, and little note did he take of the various groups of Huns that passed him.

'Is it not so?' he said, as he wandered on—'is it not clearly so? Is it not the will of heaven, distinctly revealing unto me the way to save the people of the Lord? Shall this pagan barbarian smite the faithful and the just? Heaven forbid! God has provided a remedy. The Lord has found a means of deliverance! I will do His will! I will work under the guidance of His spirit! I will not delay, no, not an hour; but I will gird up my loins, and be doing!'

Long he wandered on, and long he continued thus muttering to himself; but at length he stopped suddenly, and exclaiming, 'God strengthen me!' he turned and took his way straight to the tent of Ildica. Her attendants, in the outer apartment, sought to prevent his entrance; but he said, 'I *must* see the Roman maiden: I come to bring her consolation.' And after some delay and inquiry within, he was admitted.

Neva was with her still, and the wife of Arderic, with some other women of high station amongst the Huns, were also present, striving to give her consolation; but Ildica, with her eye all tearless, and fixed upon the ground, sat in the midst, her hands clasped together, her lip silent, her features motionless, as if she heard not one word of all that was addressed to her.

'Daughter,' said Mizetus, in the pure harmonious tongue of her own land—'daughter, listen to me!'

There was something in the sweet tone of the melodious Greek—there was something in it associated with home, and happiness, and early years, and the bright images of joys for ever gone, that seemed to startle her, and for a moment she looked up with a thoughtful gaze upon his countenance; but the next moment she dropped her eyes again, and remained as silent as before.

'Daughter, listen to me,' continued the enthusiast, in that wild but elevated tone, which will command attention if aught on earth can awaken it—'listen, for I bring thee consolation! I bring thee consolation from on high! It is revealed unto me, that thou art reserved for great things, and destined to work the deliverance of people and of nations! It is revealed unto me, that by thy hand shall the faithful of the Lord be delivered, and that thou in thy beauty, and in thy wisdom, shall do more than the mighty and the great have been able to accomplish!'

Still Ildica gave no sign of attention. Not a feature in her face was moved, and she remained gazing with the same fixed meditative look on one spot of the ground, as if utterly absorbed in deep and unbroken thought. The enthusiast paused, to see whether she heard or not, and for a moment all was silence. But the next instant, to the surprise of all, the lips of the fair unhappy girl were seen to move; and, as if the Greek accent of Mizetus had touched the thrilling chord of association between her present misery and the moment when misfortunes first began to fall upon her, recalling the dark and painful moment when she quitted Dalmatia, her voice was heard singing snatches of the song that

her mother's slaves had poured forth when they left behind them Aspalathos for ever :

We leave you behind us, sweet things of the earth ;
Our life is a race to the death from the birth ;
We pause not to gather the flowers as they grow ;
The goal is before us, and on we must go.

'Fair scenes of our childhood ! dear homes of our youth !
Memorials of innocence, virtue, and truth !
The land of our birth, the dear mother that bore,
We leave you behind us, we see you no more !

'We leave you behind us, sweet things of the earth,
Hopes, joys, and endearments, sports, pleasure, and mirth ;
Like a tempest-driven ship, sailing by some bright shore,
Time hurries us onward, we see you no more !'

And when she had done, she looked round her, with a smile so terrible at such a moment, that every woman's eye there present, whether they understood the words or not, overflowed with tears.

'Poor maiden !' cried Mizetus, 'her heart is fearfully oppressed, her spirit sadly bowed down. Heavy has been the burden that the Lord has given her to bear, but great is the glory he reserves for her. Neither shall the mind break, nor the spirit be crushed under its load ; but with time, and with care, and with consolation, this wandering mood shall pass away. Let us now, however, leave her, for the presence of many may irritate rather than soothe. Thou maiden,' he continued, turning to Neva, 'thou that seemest to take a deeper interest than the rest, abide with her, and watch over her tenderly. Watch over her ! watch over her carefully ! for she has yet her appointed task to do.'

Thus saying, he quitted the tent, and the women followed, leaving Neva with Ildica alone. The next morning early, Mizetus took his way towards the tent of Ildica, ere the army began its march ; but, as he advanced, a spectacle arrested his progress for a moment, which the Huns themselves in passing gazed on fearfully, but paused not to examine. Down from the tent of Attila to the bank of the rivulet extended a double row—an avenue, in short, of enormous crosses ; and nailed upon them, as had been the case in the neighbourhood of Verona, appeared the corpses of at least a thousand of the monarch's own immediate subjects.

Amongst them were many of those chiefs and officers who had been previously believed to stand high in favour : and, as the various masses of the Huns passed by those sad memorials, the chiefs who had been amongst those to complain that he had not marched on Rome, and had yet escaped the terrible execution of that night, trembled when they beheld the ghastly spectacle, and thanked the gods that had preserved them.

Mizetus, on the contrary, gazed fearlessly on the proofs of Attila's stern severity, scanned the agonised countenances of the dead, marked the contorted limbs, and murmured, as he passed, 'More, more blood poured into the cup of vengeance ! More to be accounted for ! Nor is the day far distant !'

As the enthusiast passed on, Arderic rode by slowly, towards the tent of Attila, gazing with a frowning brow, and a sad but indignant air, upon the bodies of the dead. With a sudden spring forward, Mizetus laid his hand upon his bridle rein ; but Arderic shook it from his grasp, exclaiming, 'Why stoppest thou me in such a spot as this? Get thee hence, madman !'

'Not so mad as he who did this deed !' replied the enthusiast.

'Perhaps not,' answered Arderic ; 'but the deed is none of mine ;' and raising his rein, he rode swiftly on.

Mizetus proceeded on his way, and found her he sought, sitting nearly as he had left her the day before. He found that she had undergone very little change. She took her food, and suffered her garments to be changed mechanically ; but she spoke not, or very seldom, and then with wild and unconnected words, referring to things apparently remote. The enthusiast remained with her long, nor ceased, during all the time of his stay, to pour forth in language wild but figurative, and with words ready and prompt, the same unconnected and mystical exhortations to which he had given utterance the day before.

He was interrupted by the marching of the army to another station in its advance upon Greece : but ere he left the tent of Ildica, he saw, well pleased, that he had more than once gained her attention, though but for a moment; and on the following day that attention was more fixedly obtained. The third day she listened to him, though she answered not ; and the fourth day she wept for the first time. Thenceforward, though she spoke but seldom, and though, when she did speak, there appeared in her words a difference from the ordinary train of thought, a slight deviation from that clear intellectual path which her mind had ever followed, yet in some degree she resumed her ordinary occupations, suffered herself to be moved on in her litter, calmly, if not cheerfully, and from time to time spoke a few words to Neva, with an effort to show her gratitude and regard.

Thus passed the time, till ten days after the sad news of Theodore's death had reached her, when, as they marched along, and she lay in her open litter, carried in the rear of the army, suddenly Attila himself appeared, and drew up his horse beside her. He gazed upon

her with an eye in which there shone some pity, and he asked, 'How goes it with thee, beautiful Ildica?'

'As well as may be, mighty monarch,' she replied, looking firmly upon him without a trace of fear.

'Thou art better than I expected,' said Attila, apparently surprised at her calmness.

'I am better than I had hoped or feared,' she answered; 'but hope and fear are over, oh monarch!'

'Not so,' replied Attila: 'there is still, I trust, much joy for thee on earth;' and thus saying, he rode on.

On the evening of that day, when the tents were pitched, Ildica, as pale as marble, was seated in her own; and leaning on the pillows of the couch, while Neva sat beside and held her hand, she listened to the old man Mizetus, who, standing on the other side, read from an open book, and commented as he went.

At length he closed the pages, and, gazing full upon her, he exclaimed, 'Such is thy lot! Such is the will of heaven! Such is thy destiny! and great shall be thy reward! Though thou hast suffered, and still shall suffer, till the work be accomplished, thy sufferings shall be forgotten in the exceeding joy of thy great recompense! Such, such, I tell thee, is to be thy fate!'

'I am ready!' replied Ildica, solemnly—'I am prepared!—Let it come!'

Mizetus added a few words more; but ere he could conclude the sentence, one of her attendants entered, and announced that a messenger from Attila awaited her without. Her cheek and lips turned paler still, but she answered calmly and at once, 'Give him admission!'

'Beautiful maiden,' said the messenger, when he stood before her, 'Attila greets thee well, and calls thee his beloved. He says that grief has had its due, and that joy must have its day; and he bids my poor tongue announce to thee, that Attila has chosen thee for the envied station of his bride. To-morrow the army halts the whole day, and at the hour of sunset, ere Attila sits down with his warriors to the banquet, his bridal shall be solemnised with thee by the priests of his faith and of thine! What answer shall I bear the king?'

Ildica heard him with apparent calmness; but Neva felt the fingers of her beautiful hand clasp tight, with agonised emotion, on her own.

The fair girl's lips moved, but no sound issued forth.—Another struggle, they moved again, and her voice was heard!

'Who shall resist the will of the king?' she said, and bowing her head, she suffered the messenger to depart.—The curtain of the tent fell behind him; and starting up, she fell at the feet of Mizetus. Then, clasping the old man's knees with her arms, she exclaimed, 'No vow!—No vow!—I can take no vow!—Save me from that!'

'Fear not,' replied the hermit—'fear not, my daughter! Thou shalt take no vow. Be but a passive instrument in the hands of God!'

## CHAPTER XLIV.

### THE BRIDAL OF ATTILA.

ON an eminence rising above the banks of a river, near which the vast army of the Huns pitched its camp on the ensuing night, was found a splendid pavilion, with workmen still labouring hard to complete it, when the vanguard of the army reached its ground. Ere Attila himself arrived, the whole was finished; and a palace of richly ornamented woodwork, mingled and decorated with hangings of crimson and gold, waited his approach.

The mood of the monarch, however, was not placable; and the workmen whom he had sent forward to prepare his abode received no token of his thanks or approbation, notwithstanding the skill and zeal which they had displayed. Those who had accompanied him on the way had found good cause to mark his discontented humour; and Arderic and Valamir, and even Onegisus himself, had seized the first opportunity of withdrawing themselves from the side of one who treated all with indignity, which their free spirits could but ill bear. The cause of this harsh humour might be, it was whispered, that Arderic had ventured remonstrances, and Valamir had seconded them, which were displeasing to the ear of Attila; but never before in his most passionate moods had he given way to such intemperance of language as he had that day displayed towards two of his noblest and most disinterested supporters. An hour after their arrival, however, they received a summons to attend the bridal and the banquet of the mighty king; and to the pavilion on the hill they took their way, clothed in the most splendid robes that the camp could supply.

In a vast hall, decorated by crimson hangings, which many a tributary land had combined to furnish, stood Attila himself, already surrounded by a multitude of his officers and chiefs. To the astonishment of every one there present, however, the monarch of the Huns appeared not now in the plain garment of his Scythian ancestors. For the first time in his life, gold and jewels, and vestures of silk, covered the powerful limbs of the mighty conqueror. The heavy iron sword which never before had left his side was now no longer there. All the rude weapons of war were carefully excluded from his dress; and jewels of inestimable value bound his haughty brow.

In the same hall, at the farther end, was raised a temporary altar, festooned with green leaves and the few autumnal flowers which the country round could supply. Elevated upon that altar was seen the ponderous sword of the Scythian Mars, famous in the history of Attila's reign, from the singular manner in which it had been found. Beside it stood a number of the Scythian priests; and the steps which led to it were thickly strewed with leaves of the wild laurel and the hemlock.

The countenance of Attila himself was now cleared of the clouds which had obscured it; but still, the joy with which it beamed as plainly testified the change which his nature had lately undergone as the frowns that had hung upon it before. In former days, the countenance of Attila had been a stranger to both frowns and smiles. The stern passions which moved him then, had wrought, and struggled within the secret chambers of his breast alone, and no light emotions had seemed to affect his outward bearing. Now, he was moved by many things; and in spite of all his efforts to seem what he had been, the emotions of his heart thrilled through his bodily frame, and made themselves seen upon the surface.

'Where are the Christian priests?' demanded the voice of the monarch, as soon as he had spoken a few words to Valamir and Arderic, in a tone evidently intended to soften the harsh impression produced by his ill-humour of the morning—'Where are the Christian priests?'

'None have been found in the camp, oh mighty king,' said Edicon, coming forward. 'I have inquired in every quarter, and none have been found.'

'None!' exclaimed Attila; 'none! Where is that rash priest Mizetus; he who by a few empty words provoked the wrath of so many mighty chiefs. I have seen him since in the camp. I saw him no later than yesterday. Let him be sent for; and tell the bride, that Attila waits her coming, as the spring-earth waits for the rising of the morning sun.'

The messengers departed; and then came a pause, dead and silent, and painful to all but those common spirits who saw nothing in the scene they were called to witness but the common festivity of a day. Arderic and Valamir gazed upon each other; but they spoke not, till some casual movement caused a murmur to run through the hall. Then, in a low voice, the latter asked the former, 'What think you will be the result?'

'I know not,' answered Arderic; 'but from what I hear, she is not unwilling. Yet, from some chance words dropped in my wife's presence, either her mind wanders, as that of one deprived of reason, or else deeper thoughts than we know of are at work within her brain. But lo, they come!'

As he spoke, the door of the hall was opened, and a bevy of fair young girls, strewing the way with flowers, entered the hall, and wound round towards the altar. Following them, and leaning on the arm of Neva, appeared the Dalmatian bride, clothed in robes of white.

No fear, no agitation was in her step; but firmly and easily she moved along the hall, beauty and grace shining like a glory from every limb and every feature. Neva was far more moved than Ildica; but the countenances of both were paler than the Parian stone; while from those fair colourless faces beamed forth the beautiful eyes of each—the deep, devoted, dark-blue eyes of Neva, the large, lustrous, liquid eyes of Ildica, shining like brilliant lamps from out a marble tomb.

They took but one gaze around the hall as they entered; but that gaze had a different effect upon each. With Neva it seemed to bewilder and confound: she dropped her eyes again instantly, and advanced with a wavering and uncertain step. The gaze of Ildica was firm and calm; though, as she beheld the scene of barbaric splendour that surrounded her, her brow slightly contracted; her eye flashed for an instant with a wilder, perhaps a brighter fire. Slowly she turned her gaze towards the altar; and without noticing any one in the hall, approached deliberately the spot where the sacrifice of herself was to be completed.

A number of matrons followed; and behind them again came the hermit Mizetus, clad in the same wild robes which he wore in the desert and on the mountain. Attila turned to approach the altar; but the hermit advanced towards him, saying boldly, 'Thou hast sent for me. I am here. What wouldst thou with me?'

'I have sent for thee,' replied Attila, 'to perform, between me and that maiden, the nuptial ceremonies according to the customs of her people and the rites of her faith.'

'I am no priest, oh Attila!' answered the enthusiast. 'I am one touched by the finger of God, and set apart to speak terrible warnings, and foretell great events. But I have neither power to loose nor to bind, to take up nor to cast down. No ceremonies can I perform; for I am no priest according to any human law.—But what needest thou think of priests or ceremonies?' he continued, seeing Attila stand thoughtfully before him. 'Let the ceremony be performed according to thine own will. Is not the will of Attila superior to all law?'

'Thou sayest right,' answered Attila, advancing to the altar. 'It is!' And placing himself by the side of the altar opposite to Ildica, he said, 'Let the rites proceed!—Oh beautiful Ildica, are you willing?'

Ildica raised her eyes, large, calm, liquid, shining as fountains of living light. She gazed on him for a moment, and then, 'I adjure thee, oh Attila,' she cried, 'to tell me truth!—Is he dead?'

'He is!' replied Attila emphatically.

'Art thou certain?—quite certain?' demanded Ildica, still gazing in his face.

'As certain as if my hand had slain him,' replied Attila.

'Ha!' said Ildica. 'Even so!'

'What sayest thou?' demanded Attila.

'That the will of the king is law.' And she cast down her eyes to the ground.

'Most beautiful and best beloved!' exclaimed Attila, taking her hand, with a look of eager passion. 'Let the rites proceed.'

They did proceed; and the strange and fanciful ceremonies of the pagan nuptials were begun and ended between Attila and Ildica!

Still, during the whole of that ceremony, the fair unhappy girl uttered not one word; but, passive before the heathen altar, she stood like the victim so often brought there to be sacrificed. Her lips moved not; her voice was heard not; and, without either consent or denial, she became the bride of that dark and mighty king.

The priests ceased; the ceremony was over; and she still stood silent before the altar, with her hand lying in that of Attila. And those who stood by and saw, never forgot the sight of those small, white, taper fingers resting in that broad powerful hand. At length she lifted up her eyes, as if seeking for the heaven; and then her lips moved for a moment, as if in prayer.

As was the custom, the women of the highest note there present surrounded her, and led her away to a banquet prepared for her alone. Ildica eat one cake of bread, and drank one cup of wine, and then sought the chamber reserved for her. They would have led her in, and stayed with her to adorn her; but she paused at the door, and bade them leave her. They hesitated, and urged the custom of the land. But she raised her head proudly, saying, 'I am a Roman even here!—But what to you is more, I am the bride of Attila, and I command you, leave me! I must spend the intervening time in prayer,' she added in a milder tone; and, ceasing to urge her farther, the women left her to her own thoughts; and every one betook them to their homes again.

In the meanwhile, Attila led his chiefs to the banquet; but, as they went, Arderic and Valamir walked side by side, and spoke together in a low tone over the scene just past.

'I comprehend it not,' said Arderic; 'I understand it not. The memory of old affection is clearly strong in her heart; neither do I think that she forgets her country, nor believe that she is one to wed either for fear or for ambition!—If there should be some higher purpose in her bosom, Valamir? If she should meditate some mighty deed?—a deed which, since Attila is no longer Attila, many a brave man in the camp has pondered on as the last hope of many here—a deed which, since safety has been banished from our tents, and the swords of our friends have been drawn at midnight against ourselves, may even have crossed my mind and thine?'

'Hush!' said Valamir; 'Onegisus watches us. Let us sit at separate tables; but humour him to the full: and, as he has now forgot his ancient temperance, let him drink deep. It matters not to us whether drunkenness disgrace him on this night of pageantry or not. Cross him not, I beseech thee, Arderic! Thou hast had warning enough this day, that Attila hears counsel no longer, even when given for the protection of his own honour.'

Seated at the banquet, the same scenes, or very similar ones, took place, which we have dwelt upon before. The same, in all respects, except in the conduct of the chief actor therein. The rude poet sang the glowing tale of mighty deeds and great warriors in the long-gone past; the jester excited the roar of ribald laughter; the wine flowed plenteously; the chiefs drank deep; but Attila, no longer calm and grave, followed each impulse of the moment—now gave way to some hasty wrath, now joined in the peal of merriment; and still, in the deep wine-cup, provoked the emulation of his warriors.

It was when the night waxed late, and the banquet was nearly over, that Zercon, the negro jester, who had already played his part in the hall for the amusement of the guests, entered again, bearing in his hands an enormous cup of gold, richly gemmed at the rim and on the handles. The shape was beautiful; the workmanship splendid; the jewels of inestimable value; and, as he approached the seat of Attila, the eyes of the monarch, already inflamed with wine, gazed on the magnificent vessel with eyes of wonder and admiration.

Kneeling before him, Zercon placed the cup in his hand, saying, 'Behold, oh mighty king, a present just arrived from a dear friend and well-wisher of Attila. Thy messengers have just returned from the Mœsian frontier, and bear thee this jewelled cantharus from Eugenius, Bishop of Margus. Happily has it come to grace thy bridal night.'

Attila took the cup, and gazed upon it, repeating thoughtfully, 'From Eugenius, Bishop of Margus!—The boy's uncle!—I will use it some other night.'

'Nay, oh mighty king!' said Zercon, 'no night like this; for in it, you may pledge yourself to avenge the wrongs of him who sent it.'

'What wrongs?' cried Attila, turning upon him fiercely. 'I know of no wrongs that he has suffered.'

'It comes,' replied Zercon in a deep tone, 'from the dead to the living! from the impotent to the mighty! Eugenius has been put to death, by command of Marcian, for admitting the Huns to the Roman territory; and thy messengers have but escaped with life and this cup, which he had just given them for thee, as a pledge of his friendship.'

Attila's countenance grew as dark as night. 'Take the cup,' he cried, to one of his officers; 'take the cup, and let it be purified with fire. Then bring it to me.'

The attendant took the cup, and held it over a lighted torch in the midst of the hall. Then, after passing it through water, he brought it to the monarch, who filled it to the brim; and, rising from his seat, exclaimed, 'Pledge me, kings and mighty leaders!—Pledge me, in our last cup this night, death to the slave Marcian, who has dared to slay the friend of Attila!' and he drank off the wine at once.

He had not spared the cup throughout the night; and now that deep draught had a visible effect. He felt it himself; and, setting down the cup, leaned his head upon his hand for a moment; then suddenly rose, and, bending slightly to his guests, quitted the hall with an unsteady step. Several of his chief attendants followed, but they returned the moment after; and many of the leaders rose and quitted the hall, conversing, in low voices, on the varied events lately passed. Others remained, and protracted the debauch; but by the first hour after midnight the pavilion of the king was void of its guests, and all had returned to silence.

Amongst the first that left the hall were Arderic and Valamir; and, as they passed through the camp of the sleeping Huns, they paused for a moment beside one of the tents in which a light was burning, and from which might be heard the voice of lamentation.

'Hark! Her slaves weeping over her unhappy fate!' said Arderic.

'What! did she not take them with her?' demanded Valamir.

'Not one,' replied Arderic; 'not one, I hear. Neva, dead Bleda's daughter, who dwells in our tents with my own children, reported that she went alone; and none has been with her so much as Neva! She went alone, Valamir; she went alone to her abhorred task, whatever that task may be! Let us early to-morrow to Attila, and let us go together. My heart is not at rest!'

Within the tent by which they stood were, as Arderic conjectured, the slaves and attendants of Ildica, weeping for their mistress, who had gone forth alone, solitary, unaided, unbefriended, in that awful hour of trial; and had gone so by her own choice. Collected in the outer chamber of the tent she had occupied, they mourned as for her funeral; but in the inner chamber of that tent were others who mourned not less, but whose mourning was mingled with a strange agitation which was neither hope nor fear.

By the light of a lamp, holding high a wooden cross, stood the hermit Mizetus, and at his feet knelt the fair girl Neva, raising her eyes to the symbol of a new faith, which the enthusiast had lately planted in her heart. Dark and obscure as was his own knowledge of the truth, clouded by a bewildered brain and distorted by wild fancies, he had still been able to show her a glimmering of the light which was afterwards to shine upon her more fully. Both were pale and haggard, and moved by the anticipation of great and terrible events; and as they passed there the long hours of that dreadful night, the young, fair, lovely maiden kneeling at the feet of that old ascetic, the tears poured down her cheeks in torrents; the sobs burst struggling from her young kind bosom; and often the agony and apprehension of her heart convulsed her form as if in the grasp of death.

'Fear not, fear not, my daughter!' would the hermit exclaim. 'Fear not for her! fear not for us! There is a mightier power than any on the earth to shield us! There is a greater arm than ever drew mortal sword to defend us! Even were we in the gates of death itself, I would bid thee fear not; for God has broken the bonds of the grave asunder, and provided a ransom to deliver us from hell itself!' Thus did he speak through the livelong night, and thus did he try to give her consolation and support; still bidding her not to fear, till at length he said, 'Fear not, maiden! fear not! Lo, the night is past, and the morning is come, and after the darkness in which we walk upon this earth shall come the light of a brighter day! Fear not! fear not! I say unto you, Fear not!'

## CHAPTER LXV.

### THE DEATH OF THE MIGHTY.

All was quiet amidst the splendour of the pavilion of Attila. Not a sound was heard within its walls, though the light of day had made the long morning shadows short, and the squadrons of Huns had for some hours been moving in the plains below. Ellac and his forces had gone forth with the dawn of day to occupy the new ground appointed for the evening halt; and two or three hundred thousand men had followed some hours after. The heavier cavalry of the Gepidæ and Ostrogoths hung like dark clouds upon the sloping hills, between which the river wandered; but

while the Huns themselves continued to march on, under their several leaders, according to the commands they had received upon the preceding evening, the forces of the two great auxiliary nations remained stationary, waiting the orders of their several kings.

Arderic and Valamir, followed by a large train of their chief nobles, had ridden at an early hour to the pavilion of their great leader, to felicitate Attila on his nuptials; and now they waited with Onegisus and Edicon, in an inner apartment of the pavilion, which served as an antechamber to that in which the mighty king reposed. They had remained there several hours; and while Arderic spoke in a louder tone with Onegisus, Valamir conferred with Edicon apart. Doubt and anxiety, however, were now beginning to cloud the countenances of all; and some of the inferior attendants from time to time looked in, to see if the kings had yet been admitted to the presence of their chief.

'This is very strange!' said Arderic at length: 'what may it mean?'

'It will soon be noon!' said Valamir; 'and it is more than strange, that he, who through life has risen daily with the morning light, should show himself thus tardy.'

'It were well to wake him,' said Onegisus.

'Ay, if he may be wakened,' muttered Arderic, drawing back the curtain which hung over an ornamented door of woodwork. 'But what is here?'

Each started forward at his sudden exclamation; and beheld, welling from underneath the door, like water from the shelf of a rock, and dabbling the rushes with which the floor was strewed, a stream of dark gore, which had been concealed by the curtain. They gazed upon it, and then in one another's faces for a moment; and no one found a voice, till Onegisus, turning suddenly, as if to leave the chamber, exclaimed, 'I will call the attendants! We must force the door!'

'On your life, Onegisus!' cried Arderic, seizing him in his powerful grasp, and drawing his sword—'You stir not hence! We must deal with this deed alone. Valamir, you are with me. Edicon, I can trust in you; guard yonder doorway!'

'What would the noble Arderic?' cried Onegisus; 'why grasp you me so tight, O king? I seek not to oppose your will; for if I judge by yon dark blood aright, there is none in all this camp greater than Arderic. What would the mighty king with his servant?'

'I would nothing that is wrong, Onegisus!' replied Arderic, freeing him from his grasp, as soon as he saw that Edicon had placed himself before the door which led to the outer halls; 'I seek nothing that is wrong! I covet not the greatness that thou talkest of! I demand no pre-eminence! Valamir, my friend, are we not equal in all things? or, if there be a difference, thou art superior to me in calm considerate wisdom, and no way inferior to me either in power or right. What I seek, Onegisus, is this,—only this! that we who are here present may investigate this deed alone, and take counsel together upon whatever exigency we may find before us. Thou art a man of wisdom and of courage, and true ever to thy word. Swear to me that thou wilt bear a part in whatsoever we determine, in regard to the deed that is past; that thou wilt join in whatever report we make regarding the dark secrets of yon silent chamber; or we must find means to silence thy tongue, lest it sow dissension amongst the host, and give us over to the power of the enemy!'

'Willingly will I swear what you require, oh noble Arderic!' replied Onegisus, 'so far as regards the present deed; but if dissensions come—and I see that thy fears and mine look the same way—I will not pledge myself to take any given part. I will act freely as my judgment shall dictate, when the time shall arrive! Rather than do otherwise, I would bid you plunge your swords into my bosom even now, and let me die before the doorway of my murdered master!'

'Onegisus,' replied Arderic, in a solemn and melancholy tone, 'we know not yet what has befallen, but the oath that thou hast pledged is enough. None loved Attila better than Arderic, while Attila remained himself; but we all feel that Attila has been unjust! Now let us seek admittance here!' and he struck upon the door with his clenched hand, exclaiming, 'Ho! does Attila sleep? What, ho! within there! The sun stands high at noon!'

There was no answer. All was as silent as the grave.

There came an awful pause, while each looked anxiously in the face of the other. But then was heard a sound in the outer chambers, and voices in high dispute; the tone of a stranger, though speaking the Hunnish language well, demanding entrance, and the tongues of the attendants refusing him admittance. Then again were words spoken in the well-known voice of Theodore, the son of Paulinus, 'Out of my way! By the God of battles, I will cleave thee to the jaws! Out of my way, I say! Be it on thine own head, then, fool! Thou strivest with a madman! Down!'

Then came a heavy fall.

'Give him admittance, give him admittance,' cried Arderic and Valamir in a breath: 'oppose him not, Edicon! Poor youth, he will find himself already avenged;' but as he spoke, the door burst open, and Theodore, with his naked sword all bloody in his hand, rushed in.

'Stand all without,' cried Edicon, putting back those who were following to seize him. 'Leave us to deal with him. The king has not yet come forth!' and closing the door upon them, he drew across it the massive wooden bar that hung beside it.

'Oh Arderic, Arderic!' cried Theodore, 'hast thou betrayed me too?'

'No, on my life, dear youth,' cried the King of the Gepidæ, catching him in his powerful arms—'we thought thee dead—thou camest not at the time!'

'How could I come?' cried Theodore. 'Waylaid on every shore, tossed by the tempest, turned back, delayed—how could I come? But unhand me, Arderic, I am mad with injury and revenge; and I will in to yonder false, faithless tyrant, and die for my revenge!'

'Theodore,' said Arderic, holding him still with his left hand, but pointing with the other to the stream of blood which flowed from beneath the door of Attila's chamber, 'either the hand of some god, or her own, has avenged thee and thy poor Ildica already!'

Theodore gazed on it for a moment, and an awful glow of satisfaction rose in his countenance. Then, darting forward from the grasp of Arderic, he laid his hand upon the door, and attempted to open it. It resisted, and setting his powerful shoulder against it, he shook it with all his strength. Again he shook it to and fro! The fastenings within gave way, and it burst open with a loud and sudden crash. Theodore took a step forward, and then paused, while all the others rushed in.

The light streamed down from windows near the roof, and passing through the silken curtains, which both served for ornament and to exclude the air of night, poured softened into the chamber. It was an awful scene on which that calm solemn light fell tranquilly.

There, on the floor, scarcely two paces from the door, clothed in the same splendid robes, which, for the first and last time in life, he had worn; with the jewelled circle on his brow, the blazing diamonds on his broad chest and in his sandals, lay the dark and fearful monarch of the Huns, the victor of a thousand fields, the mighty conqueror of unnumbered nations;—mighty no more! Awful still! but awful in death, and from a small spot on the silken vesture which covered that breast, wherein for so many years had lain the fate of empires, and the destiny of a world, proceeded the dark stream of blood, thick and clotted, but not yet dried up, which had once throbbed in that lion heart, and now had left it cold and vacant. The ground around was flooded with the stream of gore; his vesture was soaked and dabbled in it; but it was clear that he had fallen at once without an effort or a struggle; for there he lay as calm as if in sleep, with even a smile of joyous triumph on his lip, as he had entered that fatal bridal chamber which was to be unto him the hall of death.

It was an awful sight; but still more awful, still more terrible was the object on which the eye rested when it was raised from Attila. A few cubits beyond him, in a seat, wherein she had evidently waited his coming, sat Ildica, the beautiful Dalmatian bride. On a table beside her stood a lamp, just dying out; on her knee rested her right hand, with the fair delicate fingers clasped tight round the hilt of a small dagger, from the point of which some drops of blood had fallen upon her snowy garments; her other hand grasped tight the arm of the chair. One of the shining tresses of her long dark hair had dropped from the pin that held it, and fallen upon her bosom, but in all else her dress was as she appeared at the altar. Her cheek, her brow, her neck, were clear and pale as alabaster. The only crimson left was in her lips.

Some have written that she was weeping, but they lied! She wept not. Not a drop of moisture was in her eye, though its liquid light, pure and unquenched, beamed there as bright as ever. But those dark lustrous eyes, as if the whole world had vanished from her thoughts, as if for her the whole universe, except one dark and fearful object, was annihilated, were fixed immovable on the corpse of that mighty king, whom no warrior had been found to conquer, but who had fallen in the hour of joy, intemperance, and inconsummate injustice, by her own weak, delicate hand.

The blows of Arderic upon the door, the sound of his voice, the crashing of the shivered fastenings, the tread of many feet in that awful chamber, had not roused her, even in the slightest degree, from that deep trance of overpowering thought. Her ear seemed deafened, her eye blind, her lips dumb, her whole form turned into stone, by the gorgon aspect of the just but terrible deed which her own hand and mighty resolution had achieved.

Well might she so remain; for the stern and resolute men who now stood before her, accustomed as they were to blood and slaughter in all the fiercest forms, prepared, too, as they were for the sight of death, were, nevertheless, over-awed by that still, solemn, fearful scene, and stood for a space gazing silently, as if they, also, were petrified with the objects they beheld.

The first who raised his eyes from Attila was he to whom that dim chamber contained an object dearer far than any other thing on earth; and, gazing for a moment upon her, he exclaimed, 'Oh, Ildica! oh, beloved! thou hast been true to me, indeed!'

The counter-charm was spoken; the beloved tones were heard. Ildica raised her

eyes, started from her seat, gazed wildly upon him, and, with a loud piercing shriek, fell senseless at his feet.

Theodore threw his arm round her, caught her from the ground, and, pressing her tight to his bosom, placed himself opposite to the chieftains who had entered with him. Then raising the drawn sword, which still remained in his hand towards the sky, he exclaimed, 'Almighty God, I thank thee even for this day! Arderic, Valamir, Onegisus, Edicon, call in your warriors! call them in, and let them slay us together, for this deed which she has done, and in which I glory! Had her hand not done it, mine should have striven to do it. Call them in, and let them mingle our blood together. Thrilled with the same emotions through life, and faithful unto death, that blood may well flow forth at the same moment; and still will it keep apart from that of Attila! Call them in! call them in! or, if ye be generous, plunge your own swords in our bosoms! Lo, here I drop my weapon, and offer you my throat!'

'Onegisus,' said Arderic, 'Attila has died in doing an injustice. What sayest thou?'

Onegisus paused, and looked down, while many emotions were evidently contending in his breast. At length he raised his eyes to Arderic, and said, 'It must not be known that Attila died by the hand of a woman!'

'Wisely bethought!' cried Arderic. 'The shame would travel through the whole world! Let it be given forth that Attila has slain himself. See, she has dropped the dagger. Let it be laid beside him.'

'Not so,' said Valamir; 'that were a still greater shame! Let it be said that he died from the bursting of his mighty heart after the intemperance of last night's revel: and that we found him suffocated in his blood, and the bride—as all may see her carried forth—in a dead swoon from terror.'

'But what shall be her fate?' demanded Onegisus; 'what shall be her doom hereafter?'

'Onegisus,' replied Arderic solemnly, 'thou hast a wife whom thou lovest! thou hast a daughter dear unto thine heart! Look upon yon fair girl, and think she is thy child. Remember the terrible cause that she has had; remember that her mind, as all of us have seen, has wandered since the tale of this youth's death; remember all that thou wouldst remember were she thy child, and then say what shall be her doom!'

Onegisus turned away his head; and stretching forth his right hand, 'Let her go free!' he said; 'let her go free! But if it come to Ellac's ears, fearful will be the consequences.'

'Fearful to those who fear him,' replied Arderic, his lip curling with scorn. 'She shall go safe. Valamir, Edicon, what say ye?'

'Let her go safe,' replied Edicon.

'She has done a great deed of sovereign justice,' replied Valamir, more boldly. 'Let him blame her who will, I give her mighty honour! Let her go safe!'

'All are agreed!' cried Arderic. 'Edicon, my friend, call up to the ante-chamber my train and that of Valamir, and let her be carried instantly hence; not to her own tent though, but to mine, under the care of my wife. I can trust thee, Edicon, from what passed between us yesterday—I can trust thee. Take this ring! Bid my squadrons come down hither with all speed!'

'And my brave Goths,' added Valamir, 'shall glide down and interpose between us and the Huns. Theodore, stay thou with us. Valamir and Arderic pledge their hands to thee for thy safety and the safety of thy bride.'

Theodore stood as one dumb; for life was a thing which had passed from his thoughts and his hopes, and he had only longed to die with her he loved. Eagerly, however, did he grasp the hands of Arderic and Valamir, and willingly did he intrust the fair inanimate form of that unhappy but heroic girl to the noble friends who had interposed to save them both. Borne upon a couch from that fatal chamber, he beheld her carried forth towards the tents of Arderic; and in a few minutes after, the faithfulness of Edicon to his trust was displayed by the rapid movement of the Gepidæ down towards the pavilion. Dark and powerful, the squadrons swept around, while the Goths of Valamir marched on likewise, and cut off the spot where the corpse of the mighty king reposed, from the great body of the Hunnish cavalry. Nor was their appearance too soon; for all, by this time, within the pavilion and without, was a scene of clamour and confusion, which might well have ended in bloodshed, had not the two monarchs possessed power at hand to enforce obedience to their commands.

The decease of Attila was already known, and consternation was spreading amongst the ranks of the Huns. The report, too, was not wanting, that he had met with a violent death; but those only were admitted to view the body upon whom the chiefs who had first seen it could depend; and the word of Onegisus satisfied the great mass of the people. Messengers, however, were despatched to Ellac, and the other children of the dead monarch, with all speed, by the chiefs of the Huns who had remained behind; but Arderic and Valamir took every precaution in order to meet in arms, should it be needful, either the natural thirst for vengeance of the young monarch, or the first outbursts of characteristic insolence, which his newly acquired power might call forth.

Instant preparations also were made for

rendering back unto the bosom of the earth, the clay of that mighty being who had so long proved its scourge ; and the commands of the two great chieftains enjoined, that all which barbarian splendour could effect, should be done, to give magnificence to the interment of Attila.

Ere nightfall the messengers reached the camp of Ellac ; and had they found him there, he might have returned in time to discover the manner of his father's death ; but Ellac had gone forth with a large train, to enjoy one of the favourite sports of the Huns, a torchlight hunting in the neighbouring forests; and he returned not to his tents till the dawn of the following day. Ere mid-day, however, he had reached the pavilion, where all that remained of Attila reposed ; but, by that time, the body was enclosed in a triple coffin, of iron, of silver, and of gold ; and if he then entertained a suspicion, which he probably did, the aspect of the united Gepidæ and Goths taught him to restrain any expression that might bring on the struggle which all men saw must ultimately come, before he had rendered himself certain of the support of all the tribes of Huns, and prepared all the resources of his nation.

That support was doubtful ; those resources were by him untried. Ellac stood beneath the crimson tent, under which they had laid the body of Attila, and gazed upon the golden coffin of his mighty father ; but no voice hailed him successor to his power !

## CHAPTER XLVI.

### THE PARTING FOR EVER.

A SECOND, a third day had passed, and it was night ; and, kneeling humbly before a small black cross, with tears continually streaming from her eyes, was that fair girl whose unhappy fate had led her from the sweet tranquillity of the domestic home—the home which love, and fancy, and hope had taught her to prize as the brightest lot on earth—to scenes of strife, and turbulence, and toil, to cares unceasing, and to acts which, purchased by the agony of her own spirit and the blasting of her own hopes, had changed the fate and wrought the deliverance of a world.

It was night ; and she wept and prayed alone. An hour more, and she was to be borne, guarded in safety by a strong band of warriors, from a camp where, with the light of the ensuing morning, a ceremony was to be performed, which might well end in general bloodshed ; and she wept and prayed in silence ; wept the blighting of her dearest wishes ; wept her own fate, and the fate of him she loved ; prayed forgiveness for an act she had been taught to consider righteous, and holy, and sanctified, but for which her own heart smote her, even though by it she had won her own deliverance. She prayed forgiveness for that act, heroic, mighty, beneficial as it was ; and, while the whole Christian world raised up the thankful hands, and praised God for their deliverance, she besought His pardon for the deed that had achieved it.

Solemn and sad was the scene presented by that tent, as there, still exquisite in beauty, she knelt before the cross ; and the solitary lamp, casting its full light upon her, showed those graceful lines and lovely features too truly expressive of utter despair. After a while, she strove to dry the fountain of her tears, though those tears, bitter as they were, had been a relief to her overloaded heart. She thought she heard a sound, and rose from before the cross. It was but to be caught in the arms of him she loved.

He pressed her to his bosom ; and, for a moment, she lay there, while joy ecstatic—joy worth years of suffering—thrilled through her heart, and took away all power to speak, to think, or to resolve.

The next instant, however, she started up, and struggled from his arms, exclaiming wildly, 'Touch me not ! Touch me not ! Oh, Theodore, touch me not ! I am unworthy that thou shouldst touch me !'

Theodore paused, and gazed upon her ; and over his face there gathered the cloud of uncertainty and apprehension. A doubt, a suspicion, horrible, fiery, agonising, maddening, rushed through his brain, and he exclaimed, 'Oh God ! is it possible? Have I then lost my Ildica—my pure, my holy, my beloved ?'

Written on his countenance, she saw the dreadful thought that crossed his mind ; she heard it in the deep despair that shook his voice. 'No, no !' she cried, lifting her eyes towards the sky ; 'no, no ! As there is a God in heaven—as there is redemption for all sins—I am thine, thine only, thine faithfully, thine in every thought, in heart, mind, body ! thine alone !'

'Then come to my arms !' cried Theodore ; 'come to my arms, and be my own for ever, brightest, dearest, most beautiful, and most beloved !'

'Oh, no, no, Theodore !' she answered sadly ; 'oh, no, no ! never can I be thine except in spirit and in love. This hand has lain in the hand of the barbarian. This hand has been dyed in the blood of his heart. This hand never, never can be given to thee in wedlock, pure, and noble, and virtuous as thou art.'

'Nay, nay, Ildica,' he said, twining his arms round her, and pressing her closer to his bosom—'nay, nay, but hear me. Sit down

here by your own Theodore, your brother, your lover, your promised husband.'

She sobbed violently, and her tears deluged his bosom. 'Listen to me, my Ildica,' he continued, seating himself with her on the side of the couch, and still pressing her to his heart. 'Is my happiness nothing to Ildica, that now, when fate at length unites us, her hand should sever the dear bond for ever?' Her only answers were sobs. 'Hear me,' he said—'hear me, Ildica. Thou hast done an act for which all nations bless thee. Nor wert thou to blame for any part therein. Thou hadst no other way to save thyself from a fate far more terrible. Thou thoughtest that I was dead! Flight was impossible, resistance vain!'

'Listen to *me*, Theodore,' she said, raising her head, and looking on his face more calmly, but still sadly and gloomily—'listen to me, and thou shalt see that I know, and have calculated, and pressed forth the honey from each excuse, for the act that I have committed. I will tell thee all—I *can* tell thee all—for my reason and my memory are now clear, and I can look back upon the past, as upon a picture, wherein I can see my own image acting a part involuntarily in mighty and awful deeds. Listen to me, then, beloved; and while I lie here and repose, for the last time in life, upon that dear resting-place whereon I had hoped to cradle all my after years, I will tell thee all, all the dark thoughts, and sad memories of the past. Thou hast heard how my mother died, and how a violent and a raging sickness deprived me for long of sense. Never after that, Theodore—never, after I awoke and found myself alone in all the world, thee absent, my mother gone, Ammian, Eudochia far away—never do I think that my mind regained its tone. It was as a bow which the strong arm of misfortune had stretched too far, and though it sprang back in a degree, it never became straight and powerful as before. Then came all the horrid visions of the barbarian's love; but under all those trials I struggled, as my Theodore might have seen and approved. Amidst them all, there is not one memory that lies heavy at my heart. I bore up with fortitude: I resisted with courage: I pleaded, as I fancied, with success. But then, at length, as hope, bright hope was rising up, and telling me that a week, a day, an hour might bring thee to me, suddenly, and without preparation, they told me that thou wert dead. They left me to believe that thou hadst been murdered by command of him who sought my love.—Oh God! I can scarcely think of it even now,' she continued, clasping her hand upon her forehead.

But after a moment she went on, with a deep sigh—'Well, there fell upon me a cloud; I walked amidst those around me, as one walking in a mist. I saw little, I knew little, of all that surrounded me. Brief snatches of what was said I understood. People came and disappeared like figures in a thick fog, and voices sounded in mine ear as of distant persons, that one sees not, heard talking in a dark night. But amongst those voices was one,' and her voice rose, 'which taught me a lesson of high daring, which showed me holy authority for a deed of blood, which called upon me night and day to deliver the earth from her scourge, the nations from their destroyer, the people of God from their oppressor and their enemy. Night and day that voice told me that I was the appointed, the chosen of the Lord, to do his will upon his adversary. It told me, that for this I had been made hopeless, and rendered desolate: for this I had been cast into the hands of the barbarians: for this had the infidel king been made to cast the eyes of passion upon me. Oh, Theodore! that voice but strengthened ideas which I had already conceived; it but nerved my heart to deeds that I had already contemplated. I had promised my mother that, in the time of trial, I would act as one of my ancestors would have acted: I had promised my own heart, that I would die sooner than suffer the love of any but thyself. There was, as thou hast said, no escape; there was no resistance. I was called to the sacrifice of the bridal, by a command, not an invitation; and I went in the strength of madness and despair to slay the slayer of my father, my husband, and my people; to cut short deeds of blood, by one as dark and terrible; and to prevent the accomplishment of that fearful vow, which he had made, to lay the Eastern world in ashes, and to leave not a blade of grass or a living soul between the Danube and the Hellespont. Three fearful lots were laid before me, to choose which I would. They were—to abhor myself forever, as the slave of Attila's foul passions—to slay myself to escape him—or to slay him, and, though my certain death should follow, thus free the Christian world, and deliver the nations from the sword of the destroyer. I chose, oh, Theodore, the bolder and the mightier deed: I chose that, which I believed was justified in self-defence, which was beneficial to the human race, which I had been told was pleasing unto God. I choose it with an unshrinking heart, a keen eye, and a steady hand. But remember, oh remember, that I vowed no vow; that I promised no promise unto him; that I stood passive, while they muttered, and they sacrificed, and never, never gave the hand he took. Remember, that at that very altar, where he sealed his own fate, when solemnly abjured to tell the truth, he swore to me that thou wert dead, and lost to me for ever. I had no choice, I had no hope, I had no safety! But when he fell, and lay

before me, the dark blood spouting from his stricken side, and the quivering heel smiting the ground in the agonies of death, the justification passed away; the terrible thing that I had done absorbed all thought, and feeling, and sensation. Then immediately you rushed in.—No, it could not be immediately, though it seemed so unto me; but what passed I know not, till your voice called me for a moment to recollection; and joy, and horror, and despair cast me senseless again.'

Theodore pressed her tenderly to his bosom. 'And does not this show,' he said—'does not all this show, that thou shouldst be dearer than ever to my heart? Does not this show, that thou, whose every feeling through life has been given to me, should through my future days be the object of all my love, and care, and tenderness? Yes, yes, my Ildica: my bosom shall be thy resting-place, my arms thy shield, my heart thy sanctuary, my ear the willing listener to every sorrow and to every care, my voice the soother of thy griefs, the consolation for all that is painful in memory. Theodore will devote his life unto thee; his every thought, his every hope, his every wish——'

'Forbear, forbear, Theodore,' she cried; 'for Ildica's life must be given up to God. From this day forth, no hour shall fly—but those in which He sends his blessed sleep to allay the fiery memories of the past—without some prayer for pardon, without some petition for light in this world of darkness, without some act of penitence, of adoration, of thanksgiving. What I have told thee, Theodore, should make thee know, that in this I can never change; that I have thought deeply over all that is past; and with restored reason, and a clear intellect, there is but one place for me on earth,—the calm and tranquil cell in some solitary sisterhood, where I may devote, as far as love for thee will let me, all my thoughts to God. Oh, Theodore, be contented! In those thoughts thou wilt share enough. Thou, thou alone art my object upon earth, round which still cling the garlands of sweet flowers that fond hope and young affection twined in the days gone by. Oh, Theodore! those flowers are all immortals; the dew of memory shall preserve them still, as bright as when first we wreathed them in the golden past. Their sweet odour shall still endure to perfume the very latest hours of life; and let us hope—ay, let us hope, that, with a garland in our hand, a garland of those same immortal flowers of love, we may meet, ere long, in heaven! Oh, Theodore! that life may have been terrible, painful, disastrous, but never can be useless, that makes us look forward with hope and joy to a better being and a nobler state.' She gazed upwards for a moment, then cast herself upon his bosom and wept.

He held her to his heart in silence, for there was a sacredness in her sorrow, an elevation in her purpose, which he dared not combat at that moment, though the hope of changing it was not extinct. Gladly, however, did he hear her, after a long pause given to the bursting forth of that deep emotion—gladly did he hear her revert to a less painful, a less agitating theme. 'Eudochia,' she said—'Eudochia and Ammian; tell me, Theodore, are they well and happy?'

'I left them so, beloved,' he replied, 'and trust they are so still; but that is long ago, for I have been delayed by every disaster that can befall the traveller on his way. Tempest and shipwreck, storm and enemies, the darkness of sixteen days upon the wide sea, a host of insidious foes lining the shore, obstacles, which the might of man could not overcome, tortured, impeded, delayed me; and I am here with scarce ten of all my followers left alive, and with my own life a miracle even unto myself. When I left my sister and thy brother, however, they were well and happy: she full of smiles and hopes; and he, though graver—calmer, I should say, than he was, yet, looking thoughtful happiness, whenever he gazed on his own dear bride. They are both happy—most happy; and we may be so too. Yes, yes, my Ildica, brighter thoughts will come: I will see thee this night depart towards our own land with joy and thankfulness; and will follow thee with a more rapid pace ere two days be over. We have none but each other left, my Ildica, to cling to in the world; and our prayers, our thanksgiving, our adoration, will rise as gratefully to the heavenly throne, from two united hearts, thankful for mutual love and mutual happiness, as from two separate beings, torn asunder, when they loved the most, and ending in solitary misery a life that has already known some sorrows.'

She shook her head, and murmured, 'It cannot be!'

But Theodore would not believe aught but the voice of hope; and he pressed her closer to his heart. 'Hark!' he said, after a moment; 'there is the litter and the train of horsemen that accompany thee! Arderic has fully provided for our safety till we reach the borders of our own land.'

There was the sound of a step in the outer tent; and the curtain, which divided it, was raised. So often had misfortune stricken her, so continually had the wave of evil tidings been poured upon her ear, that, even at that slight sound, Ildica started, crept closer to the breast of her lover, and gazed forward with a frightened glance upon the moving curtain. The form that appeared, however, was not one to inspire fear; it was that of Neva, now pale as Ildica herself, but scarcely less lovely. She

was covered with a mantle of furs, and a hood of fine sable was drawn partly over her head.

On seeing Theodore with Ildica, she paused and hesitated; and either the lamp, flickering with the wind of the moving curtain, cast for a moment a red light upon her countenance, or else the blood mounted up into her cheek, and then, rushing back again, left it as pale as before.

'Ildica, dear Ildica,' she said, again advancing, 'all is ready!'

Ildica's fortitude returned. It was only in anticipation she was timid. 'And must I part with thee, too, dear Neva?' she said; 'with thee, to whom all my consolation during the last sad month is owing? Must I part with thee, too—and for ever?'

'No, Ildica, no,' answered Neva. 'I go with thee, wherever thou goest. Whatever be thy fate, dear sister of my heart, sister in misfortune and disappointed hopes, with thee will I go, if it be to the uttermost parts of the earth. Thy lot I will share, thy sorrows I will soothe, till I see thee at length rewarded with happiness; and then, as a distant gazer upon a beautiful scene, I will look on from afar, and thank God for the brightness of the evening.'

Ildica cast her arms around her, and melted into tears; and then, suddenly raising her head, she gazed upon the lovely countenance of Bleda's daughter, and turned, as if with the inspiration of sudden hope, towards Theodore. 'Oh, Theodore, Theodore!' she exclaimed; 'thou mayest be happy yet.'

He seemed to gather her meaning in a moment. 'Hush!' he exclaimed, in a tone almost rendered stern by the very vehemence of his feelings. 'Hush, hush, Ildica!—By the sacred purity of thine own heart—hush!'

He cast his arms around her, and pressed her to his bosom; and then, knowing how valuable every moment of that night might be, he gently drew her onward towards the litter, which stood without, surrounded by a large body of the barbarian horsemen. Arderic was there, but he gazed on Theodore and Ildica in silence; and the young Roman, raising her in his arms, placed her himself in the double litter. He assisted Neva to follow and seat herself by Ildica's side. 'Farewell, Neva!' he said; 'gentle, excellent girl, farewell! Theodore will ever love you as a brother. Ildica, my bride, my promised, my beloved, farewell! Ere two days be over, I will follow thee on thy way.'

She suffered him to embrace her again as she lay on the litter, and she returned the embrace. But, as her cheek lay on his shoulders, she murmured, 'Farewell, beloved of my youth! beloved shalt thou still be, even unto death: but hope no vain hopes, Theodore: Ildica is vowed unto prayer, and unto repentance. Farewell for ever!'

The litter moved on; the dull sound of the horses' feet was heard upon the grass; the last horsemen filed away over the hills; the sounds of the departing force grew fainter and more faint; the noises of the several camps around rose louder on the ear; and Arderic laid his hand upon Theodore's arm, saying, 'They are gone!—Let us to counsel, my friend.'

## CHAPTER XLVII.

### THE END OF A SAD HISTORY.

It was a fair autumn day, and the mighty clouds which swept from time to time over the deep blue sky served not to lessen, but rather to increase the brightness of the face of nature. In the centre of the plain, which lay between two wide sloping hills, was erected a tent of crimson silk, the awnings of which, festooned on high, exposed to view, raised on a low platform, a coffin of burnished gold.*

The space around, for the distance of two bow-shots on every side, was kept clear; but beyond the limits of that open ground, in one wide-spreading ring, extended the dusky line of barbarian warriors, whose hands had carried desolation into the heart of so many sunshiny and prosperous lands. Deep was the phalanx of those dark warriors, as, each mounted on his battle-steed, they sat in grim array around the body of their king. The whole plain was occupied by their multitude, and while the soldiers and chiefs themselves thus formed in regular order a living amphitheatre below, the women, the children, and the slaves swept up the hills around, and gazed upon the awful spectacle.

After the first confusion incident to giving form and array to such a vast body of men had subsided, the sad and solemn occasion of their meeting, the important and terrible events that were likely to ensue, kept even the rude barbarians hushed around; and though the dull stamping of the horses, unconscious of the cause of halt, raised a murmuring sound, the human voice was not heard throughout that mighty host, or, at most, a low whisper rustled through the ranks.

At length two groups separated themselves from either side, and, advancing for a short space into the arena, dismounted from their horses, and approached the tent on foot. On the one side appeared Ellac, the son of the dead king, and three of his brethren, of whom Ernac, the youngest, was one; while Onegisus and Orestes, a favourite officer of Attila, accompanied them towards the tent. On the other hand appeared Arderic and Valamir,

* Let it be understood that such particulars are not imaginary. Attila was buried with the rites here described.

Theodore and Edicon, with two inferior chiefs of tributary nations.

All were unarmed, as had been before agreed; and, with branches of oak in their hands, they one by one entered the tent, and laid the leafy offering on the bier of Attila. His children and the two Hunnish chieftains stood on the one side of the coffin, and the two kings with their companions on the other; and, after gazing for a time on the gold that covered the ashes of the mighty king, they raised their eyes to each other, and it was evident that but little love existed between those who were there face to face.

There came an uneasy pause; and then Arderic, breaking silence, said, 'Are we not here, oh Ellac! to celebrate the funeral of that mighty king, who, for so many years, has led us on to battle and to victory? If so, let us plight our hands unto each other, that, for two days, all subjects of debate which may arise, either between me and thee, or between the nation of the Huns and the confederate nations which for so long have borne them company in war, shall be laid aside, and that we shall live together for those two days as friends and brethren united in common love and reverence for the mighty dead.'

Ellac gazed at him with a fierceness that he could scarce subdue; and, after a violent struggle with himself, replied, 'So shall it be, oh Arderic; when thou hast satisfied me of one thing. Ere I clasp the hand of any man in amity, even if that amity be to last but for two days, I will know whether the hand offered to me be pure from my father's blood. Of late thou hast been heard to murmur at the will of the king—to condemn his actions—to say that he was changed—to declare the executions that his will ordained unjust: ay, and, meddling even in his domestic life, to oppose, till his own wrath was excited, his taking to his bed a pitiful Dalmatian girl.'

Theodore's hand grasped for the hilt of his sword; but fortunately the weapon was away.

'On the day of my father's death,' continued Ellac, 'comes back yonder Roman, the affianced husband of this slight womanly toy, wherewith Attila chose to solace his hours of idleness. Thou and some few others are together in the antechamber of the king, when the viper he has nourished in his bosom returns. The king is found drowned in his blood. All this is strange, oh Arderic!'

'Ellac,' replied Arderic sternly and solemnly, 'darest thou to accuse me of the murder of thy father, or of sharing in any way in his death? Arderic was the friend of Attila, but the enemy of those faults which, alas! were growing but too thick upon him. But I tell thee, Ellac, that, perchance, the thought of slaying Attila might be more familiar to the heart of his own son than to the breast of Arderic! Silence! and hear me,' he continued, in a voice of thunder, seeing that Ellac was about to interrupt him—'silence! and hear me to an end: then answer! I know thine inmost thoughts, oh Ellac! But here I swear,' and he laid his broad hand upon the coffin, 'by the immortal gods, and by the blood of Attila! that neither I nor mine, nor one here present with me, is guilty of the death of the mighty king—contrived, or aided, or executed his murder. Now, oh Ellac! if thou art still unsatisfied, let this triple coffin be opened, and thou and I will separately place our hands upon the heart of Attila, calling on him to show who most conspired, longed for, thought of, planned the death of that great king. Then shall we see at whose touch his blood will soonest flow!'

Ellac turned away his head. 'It is enough,' he said; 'thine oath will satisfy me!'

A bitter and indignant smile curled the lip of Valamir at his reply. 'Since thou art satisfied, Ellac,' he said, 'pledge us thine hand, that here, meeting in peace, at the funeral of thy father, we, his friends, the companions of his toils, the sharers in his successes, may in peace also offer to his ashes the honours due to the mightiest monarch, the greatest conqueror, the most heroic warrior that earth has ever seen, or shall see! Pledge us thy hand, that for this day and the next, peace, and amity, and good faith shall reign between the Huns and the nations we command, and let every question which may cause dispute or division be postponed till those days have passed.'

Ellac hesitated. 'Yonder is the grave,' he said at length, pointing to a deep pit and a high mound of earth, which had been cast up to form it—'yonder is the grave! Thou knowest, Arderic, that the blood of slaves and captives must be shed, as a sacrifice, on the spot where rest the bones of Attila. Thou wouldst not send the spirit of the mighty king upon its long journey through the realms of night with no attendant shades around it. I claim a sacrifice; and as the first, who follows the great monarch to the pastures of the dead, I claim the bride that he had wedded on his night of death; I claim her he had made his own in the sight of heaven and earth, to follow him whithersoever the gods shall appoint him to go!'

'Out on thee, fiend!' cried Theodore; 'out on thee, unjust and barbarous man! Lover of blood, faithless, false, and insolent! no bride of Attila's was she; no sacrifice shall she be to the demon of thy mighty father—to the manes of him, who, had he been as pitiful and as contemptible as his son, would never——'

'Hush, hush!' cried Arderic, laying his

hand upon his arm—'hush, hush, Theodore! Provoke not quarrel now! Ellac, what thou demandest is impossible. Were she even here in the camp, my honour, and the glorious name of Attila himself, would demand, that she, whose hand had lain in his, should be held sacred, so long as Arderic had a sword to wield in her defence. But she is far hence. Long, long miles separate us from her; and ere thou or thine could reach her, she would be safe in her own land. If thou wilt swear peace, why well! but seek not to delay us longer with vain and idle pretexts!'

'Pretexts!' exclaimed Ellac furiously; 'proud leader, who art thou, to talk to me of pretexts? Who is king here on the Pannonian soil, that thou shouldst beard me thus?'

'Beard thee!' cried Arderic, with a scornful laugh. 'Who is king here? why, beardless boy, Arderic is king as well as thou art! Thy father's friend, but not his servant; his ally, not his subject, serving him well and truly from love and admiration; but owing him nothing, no, not an ounce of gold! Speakest thou to me as if thou wert Attila? Poor worm! know thyself better; and if thou wouldst know who is king three days hence, I will give thee an answer—ay, such an answer as the world shall never forget—written with steel, in characters of blood. But let us now have peace! If thou wilt now swear to deal faithfully with us, say so at once. If not, lo we mount our horses, and we draw our swords. But upon thee and thine be the shame and the disgrace of dishonouring thy father's ashes. We offer thee peace, to perform the rites due to the ashes of the mighty king—take it or refuse it, now, and at a word.'

Onegisus caught the arm of Ellac, as he was about to reply, and whispered with him eagerly for several minutes. Ellac looked down sullenly on the ground for a moment, and then, raising his eyes, replied, 'Peace! let it be peace for those two days! I swear to keep it inviolate by the ashes of my father, and by the eternal gods. But after that, oh Arderic! will come the trial between thee and me. The hosts that have conquered under Attila shall not be divided under his son. Let our strength be tried, and if thou canst break the chain that I will put about thy neck, thou shalt drag Ellac after thee. Three days hence, at the third hour after sunrise, I will wait for thee in the plains beside the river Netad, where late I pitched my tents on the day of my father's death. There shalt thou find me, and if thou comest not to me, I will seek thee, and I will bow thy proud head to the dust. As for yon paltry Roman, if he come with thee, he shall find the fate that he deserves. Perhaps he may not die—his blood is too like water to be worth the spilling. Shorn, mutilated, cropped, and his flesh marked with the burning steel, he shall stand amongst the slaves of Ellac, and wash the vessels from his master's table.'

'Ellac,' answered Theodore, calmly, 'Ellac, I will come! and if the God of battles abandon me not now, I will give unto thee a better fate than that which thou wouldst grant to me. On the third day hence look thou well unto the dawning sun, for if I live, thou never shalt see it rise again. For these two days, however, let us all swear peace!'

'We swear! we swear!' they cried, and laid their hands upon the bier of Attila.

* * * * *

The dark squadrons began to move, a thousand horsemen at a time, and with a slow and solemn pace they approached the tent where lay the body of the mighty king, wheeling round it once, with still decreasing speed, as if reluctant to pass for the last time before him who had so often led them on to victory. Ever as they went, with downcast looks, they sung to a wild and melancholy air the song of the departed great.

When each squadron had performed its round, it took its place once more in the vast circle, and another succeeded and performed the same sad rite, till, at length, when the sun's course had waned to less than an hour of light, the whole had completed the task. Then ten of the greatest chieftains lifted the golden coffin, and, placing it on their crossed spears, bore it towards the grave.

As they advanced, the circle of the Huns, rendered skilful in such an evolution by their practice in hunting, grew smaller and smaller, pressing into a narrower ring; and forth, from amongst them, were driven a crowd of pale and ghastly wretches, who knew the fatal hour of their immolation nigh, and yet, with vain and fruitless hopes, looked round for impossible escape. That iron ring was at length narrowed to less than a bow-shot in diameter, and some hundred, or more, of the chief warriors, pushing their horses forward, drove the trembling slaves on to the brink of the pit.

The golden coffin was slowly lowered down into the grave. Those who were behind pressed onward to behold. The swords of the nearest warriors leaped from their sheaths; waved above the heads of the victims, and a loud and fearful shriek rang up to the offended sky. Jewels, and gold, and precious stones, were showered in from all hands amongst the blood and writhing bodies that half filled up that horrible tomb. Then piled they in the cold grey soil, till it rose in a mount high above the rest of the land. They covered it with the turf they had removed.—Night fell, and all was done.

* * * * *

An old man stood upon a hill and gazed, and though arrows fell at his feet, still he looked forth upon a wide spread grassy plain, where two mighty hosts had been contending, from the third hour after the dawn of day till the fourth hour following noon. They had met, myriads upon myriads ; but now, thin and scanty was the field, and few and weary were the combatants ; but still that old man gazed, and still his voice murmured forth, 'Lord God Almighty, thou dealest righteously ! The slayers of all men are slain by their own swords !'

At length, where flowed a rivulet on to the neighbouring river, those two dark armies seemed separated for a space, and rolled, like two thunder clouds ready to meet, at a little distance from either bank : then, like lightning from those clouds sprang forth two gallant men, borne on towards each other by their fiery chargers, as swiftly and unwearied as if throughout that day there had neither been fatigue nor strife. The one was habited as a Roman, and his steed, plunging in the stream, bore him to the other bank ere his adversary could reach it. They met ; their swords waved in the air ; the eyes of the beholders were dazzled ; but, in a moment after, the barbarian was seen bending to his saddle bow. A second deep stroke descended on his neck, and, falling headlong, he rolled, a corpse, upon the plain !

The Gepidæ poured across the stream : the Huns fled in disarray ; slaughter and destruction hung upon their rear, and the mighty fabric of Attila's empire was at an end for ever.

* * * * *

Nearly thirty years after, when the empire of the west was at an end, and the empire of the east revived for a time, with a show of false prosperity, a powerful man, clothed in the splendid arms of a prætorian præfect, wandered up one of the low hills which border the Illyrian shore. He was led by a woman, on whose fair countenance remained the traces of splendid beauty ; and whose deep blue eyes still retained an expression of deep devoted tenderness, though that tenderness was now given to the highest object of human feelings. She was clothed in the habit of a recluse, such as was then common, and the way they took was towards the cemetery of a solitary nunnery. The guards of the præfect remained below ; but he himself was admitted by a special favour ; and, passing through the little wicket gate into the calm and silent spot where reposed the ashes of the holy and the pure, they came, after a few steps, to a grave covered with fresh turf.

'She lies there !' said Neva—and Theodore cast himself down upon the grave of Ildica, and wept.

THE END.

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